Walking the Black Country Tightrope:

The development of white working-class males' expectations toward (non) participation in Higher Education

by

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Abstract

Over the last 25 years, a noted disparity in the levels of educational attainment between white working-class males and their more affluent counterparts, has been a common feature of discussion within research and educational policy in the UK. In more recent times, this discourse has widened to highlight a similar disparity in the rates of white working-class males accessing Higher Education.

This study seeks to increase understanding of how, against such a backdrop, the white working-class males participating in this research accessed, accrued and mobilised available social, cultural and economic resource to form expectations for their future in education and work. In particular, the inquiry focused on how the participants' expectations were negotiated in relational engagement with their specific social, geographic and historical context.

Taking place at a school located in a small Black Country town, the research employed a qualitative approach to facilitate a richness of understanding. It analysed findings from semi-structured interviews with staff at the school, alongside data provided by several core participants and members of their social networks, to address three overarching research questions.

Firstly, it investigated how the school's staff deployed practices to develop the future orientations of students in alignment with certain educational and career trajectories. Secondly, the research examined how the study's core participants drew upon social, cultural and economic resources when deciding what was 'possible' for their future in education and work. Finally, the study engaged with key individuals within the core participants' social network, exploring how their experiences in education and work influenced the future orientations of those individuals who constituted the primary focus of the research.

Mobilising the theoretical tools of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), alongside Hodkinson and Sparkes' *horizons for action* (1996), the study contests notions of an 'aspirational defecit' amongst white working-class males in education. Instead, the study's findings illustrate how future educational expectations are shaped in a relational engagement with intergenerational experiences of education and work in a de-industrialised Black Country town.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

As a white male who grew up in a town which, according to the Office for Students (OfS) POLAR4 dataset, has some of the lowest rates of adults holding Higher Education (HE) qualifications in the country, it was never a taken for granted assumption that I, or many of my childhood friends, would go to university. Some fifteen years later, with evidence suggesting that HE participation rates for white working-class males are still amongst the lowest in the country (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019), it would appear that for young men growing up in such communities, very little has changed.

In 2012, four years prior to the commencement of this study, I began work as an educational outreach officer for a university. Such employment provided an opportunity to reflect on what it was about my upbringing, and indeed that of many of my friends, which meant engagement with schools in towns like ours were often deemed a 'priority' within work to widen access to HE.

A pervasive discourse at the time surrounded a 'poverty of aspiration' amongst working-class individuals, something which the Coalition Government was actively seeking to address through its strategy for social mobility (2011). Within my work to widen university access, addressing such an 'aspirational deficit' became an objective which underpinned our engagement with young working-class students.

Whilst I did not feel that an explanation of low ambition amongst students deemed to be 'disadvantaged' rang particularly true within my own experiences (further discussed in Section 3.2), for the first part of my career the narrative acted as a guiding tenant within my practice. Embedded within an overarching agenda of 'aspiration raising', I gave assembly talks, delivered workshops and ran summer schools, encouraging students to aspire toward a 'gold standard' of geographic and social mobility; accomplished through moving away to university.

Although not supported by a weight of rigorous scholarly endeavour, it felt as though the value of raising aspiration amongst individual students toward such an objective was a *doxic aspiration 'the out-workings of dominant beliefs and assumptions that circulate as natural and common sense'* (Gale and Parker, 2015, p.85), or a 'belief

which escapes questioning' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.98). In other words, it was 'common sense' that aspiration raising was the right thing to do.

Later within this chapter such notions, which have long underpinned the delivery of activity to widen HE access, are unpicked and challenged. Within such discussion, discourses of 'individual deficit' amongst white working-class students are positioned as ineffectual and potentially harmful when aligned with the goal of creating greater equity in access to HE. However, as the principle instrument of research within this study, I am also acutely aware that I have spent a large portion of my working life submerged within such narratives.

I am also aware that since my childhood, I have followed an educational trajectory which has led to my position as the author of this thesis. Such a journey has involved continued academic credentialization, resulting in an experience of upward social mobility. Whilst further detail surrounding the implications of such experiences for the research are discussed later within the thesis, it is important to take this opportunity to highlight its impact on my own subjectivity.

I conducted this study from a position in which my own experiences of continued educational engagement have been overwhelmingly transformational. However, they have also served to create social distance between myself and those individuals whose experiences form the foundation of this research.

The study provides an argument against simplistic, individualised narratives of 'lack' as an explanatory mechanism for low numbers of white working-class males accessing HE. It demonstrates that, instead, expectations surrounding future educational engagement are formed in a nuanced, complex and relational negotiation with opportunities to accrue and mobilise relevant social, cultural and economic resource. It also argues that for some students, a 'gold standard' of geographic and social mobility is not an appropriate or desirable educational trajectory in a climate where, all too often, such trajectories are those which are heralded as holding most value.

With that in mind, this introduction constitutes an invitation to the reader to interact reflexively with this document; accepting that my own experience in the lead up to its writing has influenced the research journey at every stage. It is hoped that the reader will use such knowledge as a tool to engage with the research at a deeper level,

accepting that whilst every effort has been made to be transparent about my own background, bias and subjectivity, such experiences can, and have, impacted upon this study and its findings.

1.1 The Study

The study is located in the Black Country region of the West Midlands; an area of the UK which, over the last two hundred years, has developed a rich industrial heritage. Described by the Black Country Living Museum as unique in the *'scale, drama, intensity and multiplicity of the industrial might that was unleashed'* (2019) in the Victorian era of industrialisation, by the 1830's the Black Country constituted one of the world's first industrial landscapes.

However, since the commencement of largescale deindustrialisation under a Thatcherite government in the 1980's, the socio-economic landscape has experienced a significant shift. A shift which Bauman (1998) argued left working-class communities to watch *'helplessly, the sole locality they inhabit moving away from under their feet'* (p.18).

In his book detailing the social conditions of young people in the region (1988), sociologist Paul Willis paints a bleak picture of the employment prospects in sectors which aligned to the Black Country's industrial heritage:

> *What is strikingly obvious is that Wolverhampton is vastly over-represented in precisely those employment areas which have declined most nationally. It is exactly those sectors in which Wolverhampton has a very much higher level of employment than the average for the UK which have suffered the most precipitous declines. The metal industries on which is five times more reliant for employment than the average for the country, has declined by over 20%. In motor vehicle manufacture on which we have twice the reliance, there has been a decline of nearly 40% and in rubber where we are over nine times as reliant as the rest of the country, there has been a decline of 30%. In Iron and Steel where we are three times as reliant for employment there has been a decline of 45%, and in Industrial Plant and Steelwork, where we are nearly four times as reliant, there has been a decline of 35%* (p.8)

At a time where census data demonstrated that 38% of the region's 16-29 year olds were employed by local manufacturers (p.24), Willis notes the harmful effects of long-term unemployment that were felt particularly keenly amongst the working-class young people of the Black Country:

> *At the bottom the structural problem of unemployment can be experienced as a personal failure in the active principle of life – as if the block to activity and participation were somehow internal: a matter of personal weakness and vacillation rather than of the mass condition of unemployment oppressing whole groups of people. The illusory nature of some of the 'solutions' on offer, particularly permanent 'job search', which do nothing for the collective features of the condition of unemployment, may not be helpful here since the 'legitimate' response of refusing the illusion can be confounded with the 'illegitimate' one of sheer laziness'* (p.92)

Within the text, Willis highlights the psychological implications of a shift in structural conditions leading to higher rates of long-term unemployment on the region's young working-class inhabitants; something which he commented could be internalised as a matter of personal weakness rather than a shared condition which, due to the large-scale nature of the socio-economic shift, affected a high proportion of the region's working-class population. The data presented by Willis in his 1988 text constitutes a historical turning point for the Black Country. A turning point which had significant economic, social and psychological consequences for the region's working-class community.

Following the publication of Willis' seminal text *Learning to Labour* (1977), a growing body of sociological enquiry has examined the consequences of deindustrialisation for males in working-class communities across the United Kingdom. Whilst the implications of deindustrialisation on boys' educational transitions will be further explored in Chapter 2 (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015; Brown, 1987; Willis, 1977), it is important to recognise that the Black Country was one of many regions facing the undesirable social and economic consequences of a shift toward a neoliberal economic ideology. Indeed, Jones (1999, p.4) contends that in South Wales, an area synonymous with the mining industry and the location of Ward's 2015 research, 60,000-120,000 people became unemployed between 1980 and 1985.

The social and cultural implications of such abrupt economic change for males within deindustrialised working-class communities which share a similar socio-economic history to that of the Black Country, have also received attention by social researchers in recent years. Alongside those discussed in Chapter 2, the research of Nayak (2003) and McDowell (2000; 2003) are of particular note.

Findings from studies located in the North East of England (Nayak, 2003) and Sheffield (McDowell, 2000) respectively, shine a light on the psychological and social implications of significant economic change for working-class males. In each, the effects of an industrial legacy are shown to have a lasting impact on the dispositions of the working-class participants toward work and employment, attitudes which hold similarities to those described by Willis (1977).

Turning the lens of enquiry back to the West Midlands, there is evidence that the unfavourable implications of such large-scale socio-economic change for the region's working-class population have endured. An Indices of Multiple Deprivation data set provided by the Black Country Consortium's Economic Intelligence Unit (2019) highlights the Black Country's current position within the top 20% of most deprived areas in the UK. Within such a context, the Intelligence Unit reports that in 2017 20.3% of households were classified as workless against a national average of 14%, and in 2019 the average household earnings for the region were £26,855, £3,812 below the national benchmark.

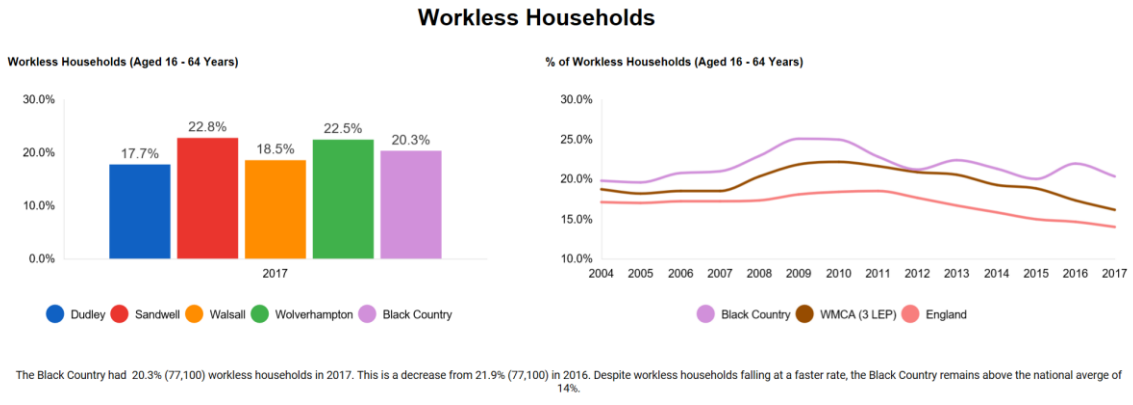


Fig 1.

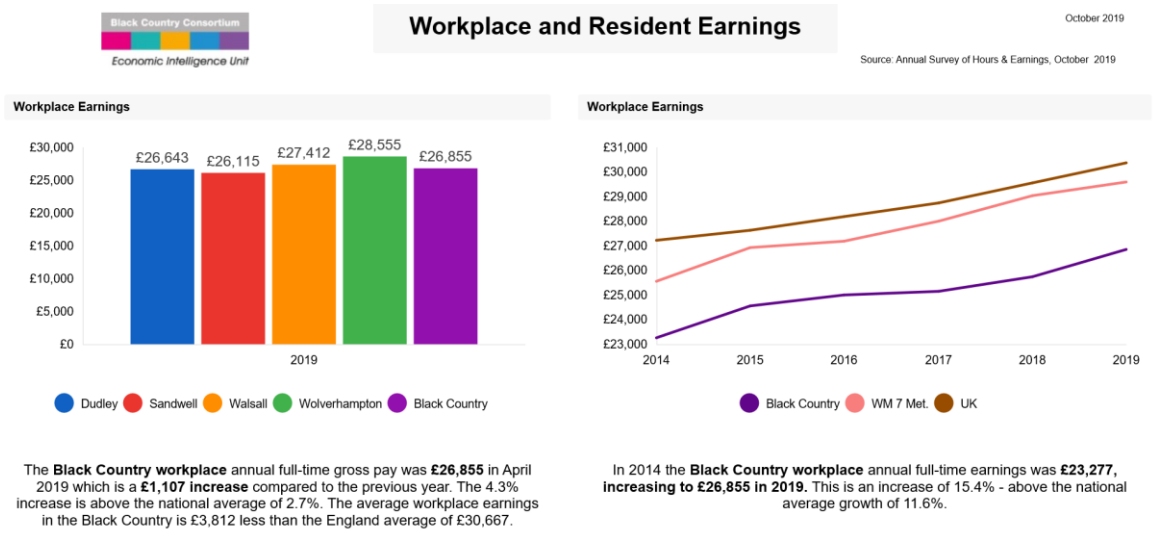


Fig 2.

On a more local level, the Intelligence Unit tells a similar story within West Midlands Village (WMV), a pseudonym for the town in which this study takes place, providing unemployment statistics within the local authority of 7.5%, significantly above the national average of 4.2%. Of the working age population within WMV which the Economic Intelligence unit cites at just over 13,000, 85.6% of the residents were classified as White British.

Within such a context, it is clear that young people in the Black Country are more likely to be facing economic and social disadvantage, more likely to live in a workless household, and when securing paid employment, more likely to earn less than the national average. The working age population of WMV also faces a significantly higher level of unemployment than the national average amongst its predominantly white, working-class population. As illustrated by Willis's comments above, navigating such difficult socio-economic conditions holds individual consequences for the lives of the residents of WMV. It could be argued that, within the local context, one such consequence has been the likelihood of their entry into HE.

According to the OfS POLAR4 measure (2019), there is evidence of a history of low HE participation within WMV. The tool is made up of five quintiles, with areas located in quintile one experiencing the lowest rates of entry to university and those in quintile five experiencing the highest. The POLAR4 measure indicates that within WMV, young participation is in quintile 2, the second lowest banding. The data also demonstrates

that WMV has amongst some of the lowest rates nationally for adults holding HE qualifications.

As will be discussed later in the chapter, the issue of low participation in HE by white working-class males within such a context has been widely discussed by policy makers and evidenced within research. At West Midlands High School (WMHS), a pseudonym for the school in WMV where the study is located, the evidence broadly reflects those findings.

Data from WMHS illustrates that in the academic year 2018/19, over a third of students were eligible for pupil premium funding, with 15% of those students predicted a pass in English and Maths of grade 5 or above. At the time in which data collection was conducted, the school had an unfavourable rating with the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and had below national average scores in both Attainment 8 and Progress 8. In 2018, a quarter of the school's year 11 cohort continued to study at the school's Sixth Form, whilst over 60% went to a college of Further Education or undertook a vocational qualification such as an apprenticeship with another provider. Of the students who were in their final year of Sixth Form in 2018, 70% continued into HE. Complimenting findings by a NEON report which sought to better understand the landscape of university access for white working-class students (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019, p.3), evidence suggests that, for many of the students at WMHS, it was entry into a college of Further Education that was the most popular pathway.

Previous research has provided a statistical evidence base for the comparative under representation of white working-class males in HE, and sociological research in education has a rich history of enquiry into the negotiation of masculine working-class identities within educational settings (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977). Within such a context, and based upon the insights into the complex negotiation of identity inherent in a working-class male becoming educationally successful, the study sought to examine how white working-class boys formed future expectations with regard to what they deemed as possible for their future in education and work. Furthermore, the study sought to investigate how white working-class males drew on social and cultural resources supplied by the school, their locality, and key individuals within their respective social networks to form such expectations. In light of this, the research set out to address the following questions:

- How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?
- How do white working-class males draw upon the resources available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?
- How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?

Employing a qualitative case study approach at a single institution, the research engages with three core participants, members of their immediate social networks, and staff at the school where the study is located, to glean a depth of insight into *'how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves'* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3) in relation to the overarching research questions. Over a period of data collection lasting 12 months, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 19 individuals including staff at the school, the study's core participants, and key members of their social networks. A four-month period of rapport building was also conducted with the study's core participants in the form of weekly interactions taking place at WMHS.

This document forms a culmination of findings from the research process. In Chapter 1, the context of the research is introduced, setting out its position within a national discourse surrounding white working-class males, educational success and access to HE.

Chapter 2 examines relevant literature, exploring the significance of class and gender-based inequality within future educational decision-making for white working-class students.

Building and extending on the research examined (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015; Fuller Heath and Johnston, 2011; Reay, 2009; Ball, Reay and David, 2002; Archer, Pratt and Phillips, 2001), the latter part of the review sets out how the study develops upon current scholarly endeavour related to future educational decision-making for white working-class students. Through engagement not just with the study's core

participants, but with key individuals at their school, and members of their social networks who constitute their most trusted advisors, section 2.4 highlights an opportunity to address the gaps in the literature identified. Following the identification of such gaps, the section sets out how the study offers the opportunity to make a unique contribution to the current cannon of scholarly endeavour in this field.

Following the review, the chapter introduces the study's theoretical underpinnings. It justifies the mobilisation of Bourdieu's concepts of economic, social and cultural capital (1977) alongside Hodkinson and Sparkes' sociological theory of careership (1997), as conceptual tools in which to explore how the core participants' future educational expectations were formed. Expectations which, the literature reveals, are developed in a pragmatic, relational dialogue with the forms of capital that a working-class individual may access, accrue and mobilise.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed insight into the methodological tools which the study employs, providing a clear explanation and justification of the study's location, participants, and methods of data collection and analysis. Within this section, a reflexive engagement with the research process is also conducted, providing an insight into the researcher's background and considerations relating to positionality within qualitative inquiry.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, findings from the study are presented. Chapter 4 engages with data collected with the school's staff members. It discusses their perceptions of the educational expectations of white working-class students at the school, before engaging with how staff felt they deployed practices to develop students' future orientations toward education and work.

Chapter 5 presents findings from interviews conducted with two of the study's young core participants Chris and Vince, who at the time of data collection, were 15 years old. The chapter interrogates how, within their local and educational context, they drew upon social and cultural resources to form expectations about what was possible for their future in education and work. In each of their cases, findings are also presented from interviews with members of their social network whom they identified as important sources of advice and guidance about the future. Through the exploration of interviews with these individuals, the chapter examines how their experiences have served to influence Chris and Vince's future expectations.

The final findings chapter focuses on the study's third core participant, Mr D. Following a similar structure to the previous chapter, the discourse of Mr D and members of his social network presented an opportunity to explore the formation of future educational expectations from an alternative temporal position. Having attended WMHS as a student, engaged with HE at a local university, and successfully gained employment back at WMHS as a teacher, the interviews with Mr D and members of his social network examine the negotiation of his trajectory through education and work with a retrospective lens of enquiry.

Chapter 7 provides a detailed discussion of the study's key findings in relation to the overarching research questions. Drawing together data gathered from WMHS staff, the study's core participants, and members of their respective social networks, the conceptualisation of a tightrope is introduced; illustrating how the study's core participants negotiated an educational trajectory in (mis)alignment with a *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility achieved through moving away to university. It is within this chapter that the relational, geographically and historically situated nature of the formation of white working-class boys' future expectations are brought together and explored, constituting an original contribution to existing knowledge in the field.

The final chapter reflects on how the contributions made by the research impact upon our current understanding of how white working-class males' future orientations in education and work are formulated. The chapter situates such understanding within a wider landscape of discourse and practice by policy makers, schools, and Higher Education Providers, who aim to increase the number of white working-class males participating in HE. After considering the implications of the findings for such bodies, a series of recommendations are made.

1.2 Higher Education, Social Mobility and Educational Success

Widening access to HE has long been cited as a mechanism by which to tackle educational inequality and promote social mobility within the UK. Since the turn of the millennium, successive UK Governments have discussed the importance of upward social mobility in creating equality of opportunity within society. The New Labour Government under Tony Blair raised the issue in successive White Papers (2005; 2004; 2003), viewing social mobility as a key component in reducing inequality;

shaping a society whereby individual choice and ambition could flourish. Following the election of a Coalition Government in 2010, social mobility continued to be a popular topic in the rhetoric of the leading parties (DfES, 2010).

In the paper *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility* (2011), the Coalition made a clear commitment to social mobility as a Government priority:

> *Our ambition is for a fairer Britain where there are more chances for people to build their skills and get on in work. If someone has not had the opportunity to gain experience in the workplace or realise their potential in education and training the first time round, that should not be the end of the matter.* (p.56)

This document set out to enhance chances of upward mobility at key stages throughout an individual's life. Covering the foundation years, school years, transition years and adulthood, the paper introduced key indicators by which to assess the success of new policy throughout the Government's term of office.

One of the main reasons that the Coalition, and indeed the New Labour Government before them, gave as a contributing factor to restricted social mobility was a low level of aspiration by those who were most 'disadvantaged' in society:

> *Every child in our country deserves a world-class education. The education system should challenge low aspirations and expectations, dispelling the myth that those from poorer backgrounds cannot aim for top universities and professional careers (p.6)*

Government rhetoric suggested that young people from 'non-privileged' backgrounds were unlikely to have high aspirations about what it was possible for them to achieve in later life. It was this 'lack of ambition to reach for the top' that politicians cited as a central concern to address if upward social mobility amongst 'non-privileged' groups was likely to be achieved.

However, Reay (2013) shines a critical light on the assumption by policy makers that social mobility of the individual is an adequate tool for addressing what she articulates as large scale, class-based inequality. Firstly, the paper highlights why such a tool would appeal to those of a middle-class background due to its alignment with a

neoliberal agenda. Reay argues that one reason why social mobility has been embraced by policy makers is its alignment with a meritocratic ideological position, one in which the actions of the individual are placed at front and centre.

Due to the meritocratic, individualised focus of social mobility, Reay argues that it '*operates as a very inadequate sticking plaster over the gaping wound social inequalities have become in the 2010's'* (p.663), a plaster which, Reay would argue, is ideally positioned to further entrench large scale class-based inequality and reproduce the advantage of the middle class.

It is also argued within the text (p.662) through the writings of Tawney (1964), that the middle class could be uncomfortable with any possible solution to structural inequality that was based on collectivism rather than the actions of the individual.

Tawney argues that what the middle classes neither understood nor admired, but often feared and despised were aspirations that found their expression not in individual advancement, but *'in collective movements to narrow the space between the valley and the peak'* (1964, p.105).

For this reason, it is implied by Reay that a call for political rather than individual solutions to addressing inequality such as redistribution and tax policies, and *'far more information and an open and honest debate about structural inequality and the workings of social class'* (p.666), in order for any real social justice in the arena of class-based structural inequality to be achieved.

Although, as evidenced above, an agenda by successive UK Governments to increase social mobility is not free from criticism, it has nonetheless been embraced. Alongside the amalgamation of a range of other mechanisms to determine the effectiveness of such an agenda, policy makers have viewed widening access to university as a key measure of success.

Since the publication of the Dearing report in 1997 (Thompson, 2017), UK Governments have regarded HE as a key instrument by which to increase social mobility in the United Kingdom (UK). After the introduction of top up fees in 2004, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was created with Sir Martin Harris at its helm. Established in order to be the *'the regulator of fair access to higher education in England'* (2016), OFFA was tasked with holding universities to account if they were

not doing enough to tackle the inequality of opportunity which led to students from certain backgrounds and geographic locations being disproportionately under-represented in HE.

With the establishment of a department that monitored the progression of students to HE and held providers accountable, OFFA was able to work closely with universities and organisations such as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), to identify groups in society where HE participation was particularly low. In January 2018, the newly-established OfS took the mantle as the United Kingdom's HE regulator, continuing to place widening access to university as a central tenant of their activity within the sector. With the establishment of requirements for institutions to produce access agreements following the introduction of £9,000 tuition fees in 2012 (Office for Students, 2018), the HE sector has been under increased pressure to make access to HE a fairer social enterprise (Boliver, 2013).

During this period, the number of individuals attending university has increased significantly. The UCAS 2018 End of Cycle Report (2019) states that, in 2018, there were over 600,000 (p.4) applications to undergraduate courses from students living in the UK. However, whilst the number of UK students progressing on to undergraduate degrees has grown significantly in the last century (Blanden and Machin, 2004), persistent gaps in levels of access to HE amongst groups who are under-represented remain.

The UCAS 2018 End of Cycle Report also illustrates that despite increased activity in policy and practice to reduce the gap in access to HE amongst students from the most and least 'advantaged' backgrounds, large disparities still remain. Within the report, POLAR4 data is used to highlight that students from the most privileged backgrounds are still 2.39 times more likely to go to university at the age of 18 than their 'less advantaged' peers. When participation was analysed on an individual level using UCAS's Multiple Equality Measure, the report illustrated that, in 2018, students from the 'most advantaged' group were 4.58 times more likely to enter HE than those in the lowest.

However, as with social mobility, the individualised narrative which has often permeated discourse surrounding widening university access has received criticism. An example can be found in Loveday's (2015) paper interrogating the relationship

between HE participation and social mobility. Loveday argues that HE participation for working-class individuals has been constructed by the Government as a way to confer value and allow them a means to become middle-class. A process which the author contends is presented as an individualised 'choice', giving little recognition to structural conditions which present significant impediments in the accomplishment of such a goal.

Loveday argues the idea that working-class individuals who do not aspire to study at university are viewed as 'lacking', or are 'in deficit', is inherently problematic. Instead the author calls for a revision of the way HE participation is framed, moving away from a discourse which presents university as a means for working-class students to 'escape' their class background.

In much the same way as Reay (2013), Loveday has great difficulty in reconciling the view that social mobility can be a meritocratic, emancipatory project. In fact, the use of the social mobility agenda by the Government, for Loveday, has created a landscape of symbolic indebtedness for the working class in which the Government is the creditor. In order to address this, Loveday calls for a view of participation in HE by the working class that

> *…might better be understood as an emancipatory project: a fugitive evasion of devaluation, as well as discriminatory and oppressive positionings, rather than an 'escape' from working-class backgrounds.* (p.584)

A demographic who experience such inequality of opportunity, and are regularly cited within policy discourse as being disproportionately under-represented in HE, are white working-class males.

Over the last ten years the low numbers of white working-class male students becoming educationally successful has been cited as a cause for concern by successive UK Governments. Following the findings of a report by the House of Commons Education Committee into white working-class educational underachievement in education (2014), a renewed focus on the educational success of the white working-class included increased scrutiny on access to HE. In their Higher Education Green Paper (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015), the Conservative Government made specific reference to the disproportionately low numbers of white working-class males attending UK universities. In 2018, when talking

about the disparity in educational opportunity for the group at the Resolution Foundation, the Education Secretary Damian Hinds reasserted the issue as an area of political interest, stating that

> *the latest statistics on destinations of sixth form and college students have shown that disadvantaged white pupils are less likely to be studying in higher education the next year than disadvantaged pupils of any other ethnic groups.*
>
> *And, even though disadvantaged black pupils are almost twice as likely to go to a top third university as white disadvantaged pupils, they are both similarly underrepresented at the most selective universities, including the Russell Group.* (2018)

Within the circles of policy and practice, such discourse has prompted the publication of research from institutions such as the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) (Hillman and Robinson, 2016) and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019), which aimed to explore the structural and individual factors which contributed to the comparatively low numbers of white working-class students entering into HE.

The 2019 NEON research highlighted the scope of the disparity in access to HE for male students from a white working-class background. Drawing on data from UCAS (2018), the report highlighted that progression rates for white working-class males within the 2016-17 university admissions cycle was just 12.2% and 17.6% for females nationally; significantly lower than that of students from other ethnic groups. The report also provided evidence to suggest that 70% of white students from neighbourhoods with low participation rates attended post-92 universities, and that just 20% of UK Higher Education Providers explicitly cited white working-class students within Access and Participation Plans which were submitted to the OfS (p.28).

Such a commentary is illustrative of a wider discourse whereby the white working-class has been identified by policy makers as 'lacking in aspiration' and experiencing restricted social mobility. In 2014, a paper authored by the House of Commons Education Committee attempted to address the educational underachievement of white working-class students.

Titled *Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children,* the paper consulted teachers, local councils and academics researching the issue, in an attempt to unearth the underlying causes of the group's educational underachievement. Findings from the consultation highlighted the comparative underperformance of white working-class children in the English educational system, and suggested areas in which the Government could start to develop policy to address the disparity.

Following this, the Conservative Government released the Higher Education Green Paper *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015), in which white working-class males were mentioned with specific reference to participation in HE:

> *Only around 10% of white British men from the most disadvantaged backgrounds go into higher education; they are five times less likely to go into higher education than the most advantaged white men. Participation by this group is also significantly lower than participation by the most disadvantaged from BME backgrounds: the participation rates for men of black Caribbean heritage are over 20%; for men of Indian heritage they are nearly 50%; and for men of Chinese heritage they are over 60%.* (p.38)

Highlighting that the likelihood of white working-class males participating HE was five times lower than their more privileged counterparts, the paper consulted a number of Non-Governmental and Third Sector organisations to consider ways in which the issue could be addressed. In 2016, the think tank HEPI produced a report entitled *Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it* (Hillman and Robinson, 2016). Within the report, factors which were perceived to contribute to a disparity in educational achievement with reference to white working-class males were presented:

> *This is not just a matter of gender. Ethnicity makes a difference too. Leicester City Council told the House of Commons Education Select Committee of their experience that in parts of Leicester, 'the white working-class culture is characterised by low aspirations and negative attitudes to education' in a way not seen with other ethnic groups* (p.31)

The report highlighted the causes of underachievement as multi-faceted and intersectional, with a range of contributory elements such as gender and ethnicity

working together to create a culture characterised by 'low aspiration' which, it was argued, was unique to the white working-class group.

Alongside this, the report also outlined differences between boys and girls in their approach to learning. Using data from *The Programme for International Student Assessment*, the report implied that the following reasons could be attributed to the relative underachievement of males in education:

> • *Boys are more likely than girls to play video games.*
> • *Boys are more likely than girls to spend time on computers and the internet.*
> • *Boys are less likely than girls to read outside of school for enjoyment.*
> • *Boys are less likely than girls to enjoy activities connected with reading.*
> • *Boys are more likely than girls to play chess and program computers.*
> • *Boys are less likely than girls to do homework.*
> • *Boys are more likely than girls to have negative attitudes towards school.*
> • *Boys are more likely than girls to arrive late for school.*
> • *Boys are less likely than girls to engage in school-related work out of Intrinsic motivation.* (p.30-31)

Later in the report, suggestions were made pertaining to interventions that Government and educational institutions could make so that they may begin to address the problem. Most of the initiatives included in the document were of a strategic nature such as rebalancing Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding toward outreach activity with white working-class males (p.43), and aligning pedagogic practice in schools to take into account gender differences in learning (p.47). However, there were also more immediately practicable approaches outlined such as involving more male role models in all university widening participation activities (p.44), as well as events focused specifically at males' parents such as a '*Take our Sons to University Day*' (p.43).

As highlighted above, Government discourse over the last sixteen years regarding social mobility has been robust. Complementing the neoliberal values of a society driven by individual choice, the Government presented social mobility through

university participation as a meritocratic mechanism by which anyone can succeed should they hold high aspirations and work hard.

In more recent years, the focus of Government has turned to white working-class males, highlighting both their educational underachievement, and their significantly reduced likelihood of HE participation. Recent investigations into the issue have identified it as one which is both unique to this cohort, and complex in nature.

Permeating throughout discourses relating to possible reasons for such a disparity has been an assumption pertaining to an 'aspirational deficit' amongst the white working-class. Aligning with a meritocratic, individualised agenda of social mobility, such a view has been prevalent within certain reports from influential policy bodies (Hillman and Robinson, 2016, p.31), and amongst senior figures within the public sector. In a BBC news article from June 2018 it was reported that Amanda Spielman, head of OFSTED, described a 'problem' with white working-class communities 'lacking aspiration and drive' toward educational success (Burns, 2018).

Before exploring the validity of a Government agenda to address a 'lack' of student aspiration toward educational trajectories aligned with social mobility, it may be wise first to glean a clear insight into the term's meaning. In a piece of research conducted in an attempt to move toward a theory of student aspiration (1996), the term aspiration was defined as an *'ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward these goals'* (1996, p.130). In Quaglia and Cobb's view, aspiration is not simply limited to ambition and drive, but is instead a long-term goal which inspires action within the present in order for it to be accomplished.

As illustrated in the passage earlier, it has been a popular discourse from successive governments that 'disadvantaged' individuals experience a 'poverty of aspiration', implying that working-class students lack the capability to hold ambitions aligned with educational success and study within HE. A trajectory which, through the discourse of successive governments, has been presented as that which is deemed to be most legitimate.

There is also evidence of such discourse being widely adopted by outreach practitioners. Initiatives funded by the OfS, such as the *North East Raising Aspiration Partnership* (2019), demonstrate an adoption of the 'aspiration raising' model amongst elements of the practitioner community. A stated intention to raise aspiration also

features prominently on some university websites (Arts University Bournemouth, 2019; University of Cardiff, 2019), highlighting further how an assumption of aspirational deficit has become a pervasive influence within the HE sector. However, in recent years research conducted by a number of academics has challenged this discourse.

Building from research conducted by Croll (2008), a study was carried out with school age students in an attempt to glean an understanding of the spheres of influence on their aspirations (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). After analysis of the results, researchers found that

> *young people in our study generally had 'high' aspirations for professional, managerial and technical careers. There was little evidence of 'poverty of aspiration', with young people from all social backgrounds* (2014, p.66).

So, if the study found that amongst this particular group the narrative of a 'poverty of aspiration' did not align with the presented evidence, then what were the reasons for a disparity in social mobility amongst these particular students? Instead of a lack of aspiration acting as a constraint to social mobility, the research found that the main challenge for this group of young people was having a means by which to achieve them:

> *'raising aspirations' is an unfair social enterprise – impelling all children to prizes that (due to the way the game is set up), only the privileged few can attain. We call instead for a policy to focus on 'levelling the playing field'* (2014, p.77)

Findings from the research suggested that the rhetoric of Government toward a 'poverty of aspiration' may be flawed and, as a result, an agenda geared toward a raising of individual aspiration was unfair. Instead, the findings suggested that working-class students involved in the study were less likely to achieve their aspirations due to the structural inequalities that they faced, namely a lack of access to resources, that would facilitate the accomplishment of their goals.

Could it be that instead of working-class students having a 'problem' with a 'lack of aspiration' toward professional and managerial careers, the Government has not done enough to put structures in place to help them achieve their ambitions? In a statement

to the House of Commons Education Select Committee as part of the *Underachievement in Education of White Working Class Children* report (2014), Professor David Gillborn warned that

> *It is easy to fall into a kind of deficit analysis: an assumption that, if a group is underachieving there must be a problem with the group, whereas we have an awful lot of research showing that schools tend to treat groups in systematically different ways* (p.103)

However, it is interesting to note that in the Boys to Men report by HEPI in 2016, it was instead a statement from the *Underachievement in Education of White Working Class Children* report by Leicester City Council that made its way into their findings:

> *the white working class culture is characterised by low aspirations and negative attitudes to education' in a way not seen with other ethnic groups* (p.31).

As the analysis by HEPI also makes suggestions for interventions such as *'Take our sons to University Day'* (2016, p.43), placing responsibility to solve a perceived 'lack of aspiration' on the parents of the white working-class males; it may lead one to question whether the cautionary words regarding the assumption of deficit from Professor Gillborn were heeded.

If, as implied by Archer, DeWitt and Wong's (2014) paper, it is structural inequality rather than a 'lack of aspiration' that is the cause of the disparity in the number of working-class young people achieving upward social mobility, then what specific advantages afforded to more affluent students are working-class learners missing out on?

In research conducted by St Clair et al. (2013) investigating student aspiration as a conduit in which to accomplish career goals, the findings implied that a high level of aspiration was necessary for social mobility, but not sufficient in isolation:

> *It was not unusual for somebody to want to be a lawyer and attend university, but only be taking three GCSE examinations when eight would be necessary for the next stage of study. The lack of knowledge of pathways to achieve aspirations was an important issue (p.735)*

This sentiment was mirrored by evidence presented by Dr Francis to the House of Commons Education Select Committee in 2014:

> *There is a lot of evidence that working-class families have high aspirations. What they do not have is the information and the understanding as to how you might mobilise that aspiration effectively for outcomes for your children. Money makes a big difference here (…) but also an understanding of the rules of the game (p.29)*

In recent years, a litany of academic research has supported such statements in challenging the discourse of individual deficit linked to a perception of 'low aspiration'. A notion which, as highlighted in this chapter, has been mobilised as an explanatory model for social immobility and disparities in progression into HE for working-class students.

As discussed above, a number of studies have suggested that there is little evidence to support notions of 'aspirational defecit' amongst working-class students toward education and work which could be considered middle-class (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013). Instead the body of work scrutinises the validity of 'aspirational defecit' as an explanatory model for the disparity in access to HE experienced by the group

Drawing parallels with the statement of Dr Francis to the Education Select Committee in 2014, research has suggested that an uneven playing field of educational opportunity is a strong contributing factor toward the disparity in educational attainment and university access for working-class students. Recent studies have also suggested that in order to effectively address such a disparity, a more nuanced approach, taking into account relationships between aspiration, expectations and school achievement (Khattab, 2015), holds greater explanatory value.

A growing body of research evidence suggests that within the context of widening university access, a sole focus on raising aspiration within educational practice is often an ineffectual tool to achieve such an end (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Spohrer, 2016; Spohrer, 2015; Croll and Attwood, 2013). It is also acknowledged as one which does little to address the complex structural barriers which many students from groups who are currently under-represented within HE may face.

Instead, it could be argued, scaffolds need to be put into place around aspiration in order for working-class students to make what Ball, Reay and David describe as the *contingent choice* of going to university (2002). Such a choice, the authors suggest, lies outside of their lived experiences, and is one in which they have little access to the relevant cultural, social and economic resources required to be successful. In a 2018 paper on student aspiration by Harrison and Waller it is suggested that instead, a framework of practice which takes into account the complex negotiation of structural forces which intersect to form future expectations, rather than isolated activity with the aim of increasing aspiration toward HE participation, is required.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In the opening section of this document, the stark disparity between the likelihood of white working-class boys successfully progressing to HE in comparison to their more 'advantaged' peers was evidenced. It argued that in recent years, policy makers have cited a perceived aspirational deficit amongst white working-class individuals as a likely cause of such an imbalance. It also demonstrated how discourse has been a pervasive influence both in research by leading Think Tanks (Hillman and Robinson, 2016), and for universities conducting activity designed to widen access to HE (Arts University Bournemouth, 2019; University of Cardiff, 2019).

However, as argued by a host of academic research exploring the credibility of discourses promoting an aspirational deficit (Spohrer, 2016; Khattab, 2015), evidence suggests such claims are overly simplistic, inaccurate and potentially harmful. Instead, research by the likes of Harrison and Waller (2018) argue that the act of future decision-making for young people is decidedly more complex.

This section sets out to unpick such complexities in relation to white working-class males. Through an examination of scholarly endeavour, it will provide a foundation of understanding in the following areas:

- Whiteness, the white working class and educational inequality
- De-industrialisation and boys' educational transitions in working-class communities
- Inequality and future educational decision-making

Firstly, the section will examine the role of 'whiteness' in discourses of inequality and education for the white working class; an examination which highlights the danger of framing such inequality of opportunity as either racialised, or one of cultural deficit. Instead, it describes the issue as one which is far more complex and intimately linked to experiences of structural inequality present within the 'collective memory' of the white working class.

Secondly, the review will engage with key literature relating to the educational transitions of boys in working-class communities. Beginning at the publication of Willis' seminal study *Learning to Labour* (1977), the chapter will evaluate the influence of

large-scale deindustrialisation and socio-economic change on the opportunities afforded to young people in working-class communities. Influences which, as the studies demonstrate, have significant implications for the future opportunities afforded to young white working-class males.

Finally, the review will turn the lens of focus to educational decision-making. Drawing on data from a range of publications, the section will shine light on considerations which influence the negotiation of future educational trajectories. Considerations which, for some students, make an investment in upward social mobility a complex and risky process.

Through the organisation of relevant literature into the strands illustrated above, the review will provide a foundation of academic context for the study; a context which will cement the position of the study in relation to the wider body of academic research, providing justification for the conceptual and methodological choices that follow.

2.1 Whiteness, the white working class, and educational inequality

As discussed in the introductory section of this thesis, terms such as 'white' and 'disadvantaged' or 'white' and 'working-class' have often been used in conjunction by policy makers to delineate between groups who experience unequal access to educational opportunity. Within discourses, such terms are rarely value-free, but as Lawler (2012) and Virdee (2014) argue, are often mobilised within an ideological agenda. An agenda which, if examined within an educational context, holds significant consequences for students who feel the harmful effects of inequality due to their race and/or socio-economic position.

The following passage delves into research which examines such consequences with specific regard to the group who constitute the central focus of this research. It discusses findings from a range of literature, unpicking the validity of arguments presenting a racialised explanation for the disparity in the educational success of white working-class students.

In a longitudinal study of fourteen thousand students aged eleven to fourteen by Strand (2011), an empirical investigation was conducted into the efficiency of the social class in explaining ethnic gaps in attainment within schools. It found that socio-economic variables could account for some attainment gaps by ethnicity, but not for

others. In particular, the study found that there was very little correlation between socio-economic status and the attainment of white British and black Caribbean students. In the concluding section of the study, Strand calls for wider issues to be examined such as those with regard to low teacher expectation for black students in relation to their white peers (Gillborn, 1990), and organisational practices that may not have a direct link to ethnicity, but nonetheless disproportionately disadvantage some ethnic groups (Gillborn and Youdell, 1999).

In further research into the area of race and educational success, a body of literature has been produced on the practices of black middle-class parents to support the educational success of their children (Vincent *et al.,* 2015; Gillborn *et al.,* 2012). Such research reinforces the sentiments of Gillborn (1990), suggesting that teachers often took a different approach to black students than they did to their white counterparts. The research found that black middle-class parents perceived themselves to be in a constant battle against teachers who had systematically lower expectations for their children. As such, the parents participating in the qualitative study detailed the strategies which they employed to defend their children against misrecognition. Such practices included long term planning, high levels of surveillance of the school, and in some cases a preparedness to step outside the boundaries of what schools deemed appropriate in order to achieve the best outcomes for their children.

Research within the realms of race and educational success has also highlighted the danger inherent in the current focus of policy makers on the white working class in isolation (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014). In a paper examining racism and underachievement with regard to white working-class boys (Gillborn and Kirton, 2000), the authors warn against the conceptualisation of the underachievement of white working-class boys in a way which could prove harmful; *'it is dangerous because it threatens to reinforce a process whereby the class bias suffered by the white youth is reconceptualised as a race bias'* (p.272). Instead, Gillborn and Kirton call for an intersectional approach to research on the subject as *'Race, class and gender always articulate with each other. The particular consequences of these articulations are complex, changing and often unpredictable'* (p.285).

In a piece of research into whiteness, the middle class and schooling in a multi-ethnic urban environment (Reay *et al.,* 2007), uncomfortable issues are raised with regard to

whiteness in multi-ethnic contexts. From the findings illustrated within the paper, which were reached by drawing on data from ethnographic interviews with sixty-three London-based families, it appeared that even middle-class parents who chose ethnically diverse comprehensive schools for their children remained trapped in a cycle whereby they reproduced white privilege. From the conclusions drawn by the study, it would appear that the focus of middle-class parents seemed to be consuming the 'best bits' of alternative cultural practices in an act of appropriation; an act which further enhanced the social capital of their children. However, this appropriation was tempered. Those elements of culture that were deemed to be too 'black' or too 'white working-class' in other students, were framed as an undesirable 'other' and were treated with disdain.

A similar conclusion is reached by Crozier et al. (2008) who investigated white middle-class parents' process of choice in their selection of an urban comprehensive school for their children. In alignment with Reay *et al's* earlier findings, the qualitative study with one hundred and twenty-five middle-class households, found that white middle-class parents were caught in a web of moral ambiguity and dilemma. While trying to do the 'right thing', parents interviewed often found that such sentiments came into direct conflict with doing what they deemed as best for their children. 'What's best' often involved acting in individual self-interest, utilising their capital as middle-class parents to ensure class reproduction and promote 'social closure' (Ball, 2003). Doing the 'right thing' often fitted in with their largely liberal, political and ideological position. By these parents choosing a multi-ethnic school for their children they felt able to claim that they were conducting themselves in a way that fitted in with their ideological position, while at the same time finding advantage in their choice of a pathway which would facilitate educational success for their offspring.

> *middle-class families may be deemed to be acting against self-interest largely as a result of their moral or quasi political/ideological position. However, as it turns out for them, or rather their children, the children do very well out of this move. They find they are in the top sets; they dominate the Gifted and Talented scheme and they are treated as somewhat 'special'. Both the children and the parents are highly valued by the schools, which in turn strengthens their privileged positions and agency (Crozier et al, p.270)*

The findings from both papers present some interesting insights into the way in which the white middle class may act with regard to schooling in a multi-ethnic context, and how even decisions which are viewed by the parents as 'morally correct' reproduce white middle-class advantage. However, the studies also make clear that there is currently a gap in research with regard to the complexities of how whiteness is lived by both the working and the middle class; a subject which authors state warrants further investigation.

What becomes clear from the above studies delving into the issue of white advantage in education is that, although the middle class has disproportionate access to social and cultural resources to mobilise on behalf of their offspring, families from different ethnicities mobilise them in different ways. Such research indicates that for black parents, involvement in their child's education is tied to countering instances of institutional racism and ensuring their child is treated fairly by the teachers employed by the school. Whilst for white middle-class parents it would appear that 'doing what's best' for them by mobilising forms of social, cultural and economic capital to ensure their privilege is maintained (Ball, 2003) is high priority.

However, it is argued that a prevailing difference in the experience of 'whiteness' by the working and middle classes lay within their representation within media and political discourse. In an examination of youth identity in times of austerity, McDowell (2012) shines a light on how white working-class youths are positioned in political discourse. Within the paper it is argued that since deindustrialisation reduced manufacturing employment, the disadvantage of young, less-skilled, typically white, working-class men in society has been evident. McDowell asserts that this disadvantage is coupled with the classification of this group as a 'feral youth', trapping the young men in a label that renders them powerless within shared representations of worth and value.

The author contends that if young men are repeatedly told they are undeserving, bad or dangerous, they are not only constructed within these discourses as 'other' but may also begin to see themselves through the eyes of others. As Bourdieu (1999, p.12) noted '*these men make a virtue out of necessity'*, exaggerating a tough street-savvy version of masculine identity in the context of an economy and society that undervalues them (2012, p.583).

For McDowell, over the last thirty years, the group of young white working-class males who may once have been in employment in factories or mines have suffered significant injury to their once proud identity. Through the tough, street-savvy version of masculine identity that, it is argued, this group exaggerates, McDowell asserts that they defend against a middle class that mocks, parodies and regulates them.

The view of the working class as a group that over the last thirty years has been the victim of significant social injustice is one that is shared by Skeggs and Loveday (2009; 2012). In a piece of research with working-class and marginalised members of society who were asked to comment on the respect agenda of the New Labour Government, the struggle that the participants had to find value in a class environment in which they were judged to inhabit deficit positions was put forward:

> *They felt that their devaluation and degradation was wrong, misconceived, the result of misrecognition, the product of an inherited injustice, and 'accident of birth', a form of symbolic violence (p.487)*

Within the paper, Skeggs and Loveday also raise the question of how it would be possible to find a socially just way in which to address the structural inequalities experienced by the group participating in the study:

> *How do we comprehend what value means to those symbolically positioned to have no value, the wrong culture and defective psychology, who are held morally responsible for all the structural inequalities they inherit and by which they are positioned? (p.487)*

It is clear from the body of research discussed above that the position of the white working class within the class structure is markedly different to that of the middle class. It would appear that members of the working class suffer a type of social inequality that, it could be argued, is reinforced by the actions of a dominant middle class and, as a result, struggle to locate themselves in a position whereby they can find value.

Alongside a position within media and political discourse which is markedly different from their middle-class counterparts, research suggests that within education the 'white advantage' described as being afforded to the white middle class does not necessarily transpose to the white working class. In Gillborn's (2010) research into racism and respectability within the white working class, it is argued that key

differences between white middle-class and white working-class groups are visible in discourse on two fronts. The first facet of discourse which Gillborn highlights lays the blame for disparities in educational success for the white working class at the feet of minoritized racial groups and those advocating them. A discourse which, it could be argued, does little to recognise the class-based inequality which contributes to such a differential. Secondly, Gillborn contends that, similar to McDowell, political discourse presents the white working class as an immoral, barbaric under-class, representing a threat to social order. Gillborn argues, in line with Allen's (2009) research, that the status of the white working class was 'White but not quite'.

In a chapter produced for a document published by the Runnymede Trust (2009), Diane Reay attempts to make sense of the educational experiences of the white working class within a neoliberal, 21st century socio-economic context. A context in which Lawler (2012) argues UK media and political discourse regularly frames the white working class as a racist, bewildered group whose disadvantage comes from their position at the sharp end of multiculturalism.

Firstly, mirroring words of caution presented in work by Gillborn, Reay underlines the complexities and dangers inherent in focusing on the educational underachievement of the white working class in ethnic terms:

> *A focus on the white working classes in ethnic terms as yet another cultural minority in multicultural Britain present a cultural reading that disregards wider structural aspects of inequality. So a cultural interpretation distorts and misrepresents just as much as the other familiar scenario of blaming teachers for educational failure (p.23)*

For Reay, such a representation is misleading and inaccurate. Indeed, in a paper which focuses on the educational experiences of Shaun, a young white working-class male with whom she conducted a longitudinal study (2002), Reay presents findings which diametrically oppose political and media representations of the white working class as a 'culturally deficient' group:

> *Shaun's story troubles dominant versions of white working-class masculinities which for so long have been key repositories for all those unpleasant, uncomfortable feelings the middle-class don't want to take responsibility for – sexism, racism, homophobia, to just name a few. Shaun,*

> *who admires his mother 'more than anyone else in the world', thinks his black female teacher is just 'brilliant' and believes 'racism is the worst thing going on in the world' , is just one illustration of how superficial and ill considered such discourses are. (p.231)*

Reay argues in a later text that white working-class underachievement in education is far more complex in nature than either a cultural deficit, or a failing schools model would allow for. Instead the author cites the collective memory of white working-class experience residing with them in the classroom as one of the key barriers to their success in a neoliberal society:

> *The white working classes bring to their experience of schooling a collective memory of educational subordination and marginalisation that is less the case for BME groups, despite the endemic individual and institutional racism they face. Children negotiate schooling not only directly through their own experiences but also through the sedimented experiences of parents and even grandparents (2009, p.27)*

In the concluding remarks Reay highlights a moral and civic neglect that she asserts are displayed by both political elites and the white middle class. A neglect which demonstrates a wilful inability to understand or take responsibility for actions which are instrumental devices in the persistence of structural inequalities faced by the white working class in education.

From the evidence presented above, it is clear that experiences of inequality within an educational context are nuanced and multifaceted in nature. Indeed, writing by authors such as Gillborn and Vincent demonstrate how black students may contend with experiences of race-based inequality regardless of the class position which they inhabit. The research contends that whilst white middle-class parents may mobilise available resource to accrue educational advantage, black middle-class parents invest significant energy in protecting their offspring against the danger of unfair treatment within educational institutions.

However, the research also describes instances where white working-class students are not equipped with the means to mobilise their 'whiteness' in the same way as their middle-class counterparts. It could be argued that, as illustrated in the work of Ball and Reay, this is because the white middle class inhabit neoliberal identities which value

individuality, competition and making the most of opportunities to 'get ahead'. It could also be argued that alongside their ability to mobilise advantage, the middle class has also not been subjected to a persistent political and media discourse which, as argued by Lawler (2012) portrays the white working class as culturally deficient.

Whilst it is clear that white working-class students face significant structural inequality when compared to their white middle-class counterparts, as illustrated by Gillborn and Reay, for this study, considering the issue through a lens of racialised inequality would be ineffective and potentially harmful. Students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds regularly face both individual and institutional racism in a way which is not seen by the white working class. Nevertheless, white working-class students, as can be seen in the disparity in education attainment and HE participation, face considerable inequality in comparison to their middle-class peers.

The challenges facing white working-class students in a journey toward educational success and eventual social mobility have been presented above as both complex, and deeply linked to their socio-historic position. Within such a context, a neoliberal, meritocratic discourse of 'aspirational deficit' (Spohrer, 2015) does little to capture the complexity of the barriers such individuals may face. As highlighted by the authors, disparity in access to the resources required for an individual to become educationally successful are bound within the social structures in which they reside. Indeed, it could be argued that without a recognition of such conditions in policy discourse pertaining to educational success and the white working class, there is a risk of asking such students to 'do a play without the script' (Bok, 2010).

2.2 Deindustrialisation and boys' educational transitions in working-class communities

Alongside its intersectional nature, it has been argued above that experiences of inequality in education for the white working class are embedded within a collective memory spanning multiple generations (Reay, 2009). If such sentiments ring true, to develop an understanding of why a white working-class boy may embark on a particular educational trajectory within a contemporary context, it is important to understand how such trajectories are influenced by socio-historic experience.

In an exploration of how social class is structured and enacted in the 21st century, Mike Savage (2015) describes class as thus:

> *Classes are the product of a myriad processes of accumulation and sedimentation. They form in combination with other inequalities, such as those which exist around, age, gender, race and ethnicity as distinctive crystalizations of advantage, derived from the accumulation of these different capitals (p.53)*

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital, Savage mobilises the concept to conduct an examination into the structure of social class in a 21st century British context. Within the text, Savage contends that relative access to, and accumulation of social, cultural and economic resource holds significant relevance to the examination of contemporary inequality.

Although Savage argues that the structure of class has shifted in line with large scale socio-economic change, the implications of limited access to forms of social, cultural and economic capital for individuals and communities remain a central concern.

One such implication highlighted by Savage lies in the growing gap between those with the most economic capital at their disposal, and those with the least:

> *This absolute increase in wealth is divisive. It means that those who start with no wealth now have a much larger hill to climb in order to reach the top, or even the middle range of wealth holders, compared to thirty years ago. This overall and absolute increase in wealth thus has knock on implications for social inequality (p.74)*

Using data drawn from a large study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Savage draws from a quantitative foundation to evidence this gap. A gap in which members of the 'elite' draw an average household income of eighty-nine thousand pounds per year, whilst those in the lowest band, 'the precariat', average a household income of eight thousand.

In a 2006 paper Reay makes an argument for the reclamation of social class as a central concern within education. Drawing on historical evidence and qualitative research (Arnot and Reay, 2006; Reay and Wiliam, 1999), Reay puts forward the case that inequalities arising from social class have never been adequately addressed within the classroom.

The argument is also made that despite numerous attempts by governments to address social inequality, very little has changed. In a climate of mass credentialization, Reay makes the case that that there is still a critical mass of the white working class that is leaving school with no qualifications at all. Social class, Reay argues

> *remains the one educational problem that comes back to haunt English education again and again and again; the area of educational inequality on which education policy has had virtually no impact.* (p.304).

Reay contends that in tackling educational inequality, a policy agenda which privileges individualised upward mobility as an aspirational objective has been inadequate. Indeed, in a later article Reay (2013) states

> *the twenty first century version of the rat race in which social mobility operates as a very inadequate sticking plaster over the gaping wound social inequalities have become in the 2010s. Social mobility, rather than the ailments it is supposed to cure, has become the main focus of attention (p.663)*

In failing to address the causal factors of class-based inequality, Reay argues that an agenda of individual social mobility has been largely ineffective. Instead the author calls for an agenda which tackles the underlying, structural nature of class-based inequality, rather than maintaining a relentless focus on individualised transition between social classes.

An argument for the importance of social class in the examination of educational inequality is also put forward by Ball (2003). In his monograph examining the strategies which the middle class adopt in order to 'get ahead' in the education market, Ball makes use of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1990) in an effort to analyse how capitals embedded within the middle class habitus are utilised to embed and reproduce privilege.

Ball argues that due to market driven government policy and the push to facilitate choice, the middle class has become a group of individuals who follow their own agenda. The fact that the middle-class experience advantage, it is argued, is not gained by having any great hand in making the rules, but instead by expertly navigating

the rules which are already in place to ensure the best possible outcome. Examples of such could include parents sending their children to private school, utilising informed networks to select the best possible state school, managing their child's educational achievement through dialogue with the school, and employing a tool kit of interventional strategies should warning signs occur with regard to their child's academic performance. Such practices, Ball suggests, are mobilised through the employment of a variety of different forms of economic, social and cultural capital which are accumulated by the middle class.

It is clear from the evidence discussed above, that the influence of social class in experiences of educational inequality are pervasive and far reaching. Indeed, Reay contends that such consequences are illustrated in a critical mass of white working-class students leaving school with no qualifications at all.

It is also clear that, as Ball argues, deindustrialisation and economic change have altered the social circumstance in which such inequalities are lived and experienced. So, if the implications of such a shift within the educational experience of white working-class boys are to be understood, it is prudent to examine the influence of socio-economic change on their ability to conceive certain routes into education and work as 'possible' over the last 50 years.

Widely considered a seminal text in the recent history of the sociology of education, Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977) shines a light on the transition of white working-class young men at a school in the Black Country from school to work in the late 1970's. Employing an ethnographic methodology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) in an examination of the boys' culture, Willis pays particular attention to the way in which the study's participants legitimated progression to a working-class job as the most desirable outcome:

> T*he difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves (p.1)*

Taking place at Hammertown Boys, a non-selective secondary modern school in a working-class area of the Black Country, Willis' research centres around a group of twelve *'non-academic working class lads'* (p.4). Gathering data at the institution over a two-year period, Willis' ethnographic approach utilised participant observation,

informal interviews, group discussions and diaries to interrogate the social conditions facilitating the 'lads' trajectory through education and into working-class occupations.

Within the text, Willis presents elements of 'the lads' culture as laying the foundation for a transition into a working-class job as a 'breadwinner', a role which has been widely associated with working-class masculinity (Kelan, 2008). Through engagement in practices which constituted 'having a laff' including drinking, smoking, disrupting lessons and messing around, Willis argued that 'the lads' gained status by their investment in an anti-school subculture. A subculture which was characterised by 'macho' behaviour and instances of casual sexism and racism.

'The lads' positioned those who deviated from investment in the anti-school subculture as 'ear oles' which Willis argues *'itself connotes the passivity and absurdity of the school conformist for 'the lads'' (p.14).* For Willis, 'the lads' disdain of the 'ear oles' was '*not so much they support the teachers, rather they support the idea of teachers'* (p.13). Within 'the lads' subculture, alternative behaviours which were seen as conforming to those of the institution, were positioned as effeminate and undesirable.

In *Learning to Labour* Willis presents the culture of the lads as one in which they deliberately failed themselves in recognition of the menial work which awaited them. For the lads, schooling was simply of little relevance to their future. Instead, Willis argues that 'the lads' valorised the forms of working-class masculinity which would be legitimated in the working-class job that awaited them in an industrialised region of the West Midlands. In later writing such demonstrations of masculinity commonly associated with the role of working-class males as 'breadwinner' has been critiqued, with research problematising the casual sexism commonly associated with it as a form a *'hegemonic industrial working class masculinity'* (Kenway and Kraack, 2004; Connell, 2005).

Despite constituting an important contribution to the cannon of social enquiry in relation to the educational transitions of white working-class boys, Willis' findings are not free of critique. The first, as recognised by Willis himself, relates to the socio-economic conditions in which the study's participants operated:

> *caught 'the lads' in Learning to Labour at the end of what was perhaps the last golden period of working-class cultural coherence and power in a fully employed Britain'* (Willis, 2000, p.86)

Willis' study took place with a context which marked the final days before the commencement of an economic agenda which resulted in large scale deindustrialisation across Britain. An agenda which aligned to the neoliberal ideology initiated by a Conservative Government under Margret Thatcher. Following Willis' study the social and economic conditions of the region shifted dramatically, a shift which, as documented by Willis himself (1988), significantly changed the landscape of opportunity for working-class employment within the region.

It is also argued that through Willis' focus on 'the lads' there was little exploration of the 'ear oles' as a group who, it could be argued, set their sights on education and employment more commonly associated with the middle-class students:

> *Dismissed by the lads as 'cissies', they were likely to leave school with academic qualifications and enter 'white collar' jobs in teaching or office work. We still know relatively little about whether such spaces are still open to—or have been kept open by—young white working-class men, and what such spaces might look like in the 'new global economic order' (Griffin, 2005, p.295)*

It has also been argued that the typology of the students into 'the lads' or 'the ear oles' created an either/or binary between the students at Hammertown Boys. A binary which Brown (1987) argues was guilty of determinism.

Instead Brown argues in his text *Schooling Ordinary Kids* (1987), that the invisible majority of ordinary working-class students were those who '*neither left their names engraved in honours boards, nor gouged them into the top of classroom desks' (p.1).* For Brown

> *the very fact that ordinary kids have been regarded by teachers and indeed by other pupils as ordinary has tended not to make them an intrinsically appealing object of sociological enquiry, and there has been little demand for such studies from teachers because they have not, at least until recently, been seen to be a cause for concern* (p.3)

It was this gap in the experience of working-class students, in the midst of a Thatcherite government and an agenda of new vocationalism, on which Brown wished to shine a light. As such, students who wished to be studying *'for CSEs rather than O*

Levels' and *'intended to leave school at 16 in the hopes of finding a 'tidy' (good) working-class job'* (p.39) were a core focus of the study.

Set in an urban area of South Wales, the majority of the data for Brown's study was collected at three schools. Although the study employed a mixed methodology including surveys from 451 respondents, the qualitative portion of the data was collected at a single-sex boys' school. Using the quantitative data to highlight the 'instrumental' attitudes of the participants toward schooling (p.45), the study then digs deeper, using qualitative interviews as tool to examine the '*informal pupil culture, to show how school is experienced as a collective process involving typical ways of being a working-class pupil'* (p.69).

Within the study, Brown argued that for the participants involved, expectations for future education and work were dictated by three specific 'frames of reference'.

Brown contends that there were those who were concerned with 'getting in' (p.105) for which school held little concern or meaning. Secondly there were those for who 'getting out' was a priority. These students held themselves as distinctive to their classmates and were concerned with engaging in activity to pursue alternative occupations to those which could be considered the norm in the working-class community. Finally, there were 'ordinary' students who were concerned with simply 'getting on'. For these students it was a transition into secure, well-paid work within the working-class locality which was a priority.

In order to do so, the 'ordinary' students struck a balance within their educational frame of reference, which Brown asserts dictated their future intentions, between acts of resistance and accommodation within the school. However, such intentions depended on '*economic and social conditions which generated enough working-class jobs for school leavers'* (p.174). As long as these conditions persisted, Brown contended, the school was able to mediate the contradictions inherent in the schooling of working-class kids.

However, due in large part to deindustrialisation, Brown asserted that such trajectories into work were subject to disruption. A disruption which presented challenges that the Thatcherite agenda of new vocationalism in the 1980's was ill-equipped to meet.

Presenting a critical engagement with *Learning to Labour*, Brown's study explores how working-class boys who were neither anti-authoritarian, nor committed to the pursuit of a middle-class career, negotiated their future expectations. Rather than focusing on those individuals who Willis argued rejected the concept of school in preparation for the working-class occupation that awaited them, Brown's study shifts the lens of enquiry to those 'ordinary' students who were the unseen majority.

Whilst Brown's work offers an insight into the formation of expectations for young men who were overlooked in previous research, the insight offered is temporally contingent. As Brown himself contends, the balance between practices of resistance and accommodation struck by the students invested in 'getting on' depended on securing local employment within the region. Opportunities which, it could be argued, in a contemporary de-industrialised socio-economic context, have diminished significantly.

It could also be contended that in light of conceptual developments relating to the intersections of masculinity and class, the works of Brown and Willis offer a reading which fails to fully capture the nuance of such intersections within a contemporary social context.

More recent academic endeavour has suggested that there is much plurality in the way in which males in school demonstrate masculinity. Research by Steven Roberts (2013; 2018) suggests that men enact masculinities in different ways which depend not only on their social characteristics, but also on the dynamics of their surroundings. Conducting the study with 24 young males, around 75% of which could be viewed as working-class, Roberts' research (2013) brings into question the body of literature which presents a simplified 'breadwinner' version of masculinity. A version that encourages misogyny and homophobia, whilst rejecting anything seen as feminine behaviour. Instead, in a contemporary context Roberts argues that masculinities present within this particular group are more likely shaped by opportunities present in the service sector, appearing to adapt their identity to fit in with their location in a service driven economy.

As a result of research conducted by academics such as Ashley (2009) and Roberts (2013), as well as a wider movement to glean an understanding of masculinity as an aesthetic performance in a neoliberal society by leading feminist thinkers (Connell, 2005; Hearn, 2004; Hearn and Morgan, 1990) , it could be argued that it is no longer

seen as adequate to impose such broad categories on men as can be seen in the work of Willis (1977) and Brown (1987). Instead Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2011) in a paper on masculinity state that a method of analysis drawing on subjectivities is needed.

In the text, the authors argue that inequalities faced by the white working class have slipped off the radar for a significant amount of time, and now that they are back on, the analysis of the group as victims of material-based subordination has little power to offer explanation. It is implied that because working-class idioms have become disconnected with industrialisation, and class practices are more led by consumption, forms such as alcohol, football, violence and aggressive sexualities have become emblems for a lack of self-management from this particular group. The authors go on to argue that because the new position of the working-class man embodies such a complex array of psychological and sociological pre-dispositions, an exploration of simultaneous articulations of a broad array of differences is needed.

In a piece of ethnographic research taking place in the Welsh Valleys, Ward's (2015) monograph examines the educational experience of a group of young males in a de-industrialised working-class community. Drawing on the theoretical work of Goffman (1989, 1977), the author sets the qualitative research within the interactionist paradigm (Jackson and Scott, 2010).

Within the text, Ward explores the impact of societal change on young working-class males' performances of masculinity in an area which, similar to the Black Country, had experienced significant socio-economic change; shining a light on how the young working-class male participants navigated insecurity and change as they made their transition to adulthood.

Alongside an exploration of the historical legacy on the masculinities of the young men involved, Ward addresses how, in such contexts, choice of academic or vocational subjects impacted upon the participants' masculine subjectivities. Subjectivities which, Ward argues, were mediated by the social and spatial networks within the working-class community.

Drawing on qualitative data collected over a period of two and half years, Ward's typology split the participants into analytic categories of 'The Valley Boiz', 'The Geeks' and 'The Emos' in which

The Valley Boiz - displayed a specific version of hegemonic masculinity tied to the industrial past of the locality (p.19)

The Geeks - displayed a more studious working-class masculinity. One which was characterised by academic achievement and an interest in comic books, technology and reading. For this group, their performance of masculinity placed them at risk and bullying sometimes occurred. (p.19)

The Emos - displayed 'alternative' masculinities through their engagement with a subcultural scene. However, they still evidenced many traditional discourses of masculinity (p.19)

Whilst at first glance such a typology may appear reminiscent of those created in earlier research by Willis (1977) and Brown (1987), Ward's study captures a plurality and complexity within the participants' data, charting the consequences of substantial socio-economic change imposed upon the region.

Within the experience of the young working-class men, Ward describes tensions and contradictions which were a constant companion of the participants' educational experiences. 'The Valley Boiz', it is argued, displayed some behaviours which contested stereotypical forms of working-class masculinity, whilst 'The Geeks' at times displayed *'cracks in their studious front'* (p.19). Such cracks, Ward asserts, were illustrative of the difficulties faced by 'The Geeks' in their effort to become geographically and socially mobile and attend *'university as working-class academic achievers'* (p.19).

In an attempt to articulate such tensions and contradictions, Ward describes a 'chameleonisation' of masculine performance by the participants. One which the author argues must be understood in relational engagement with a context where '*new times demand new ways of being'* (p.137). Although

> *the concept of what it means to be a man from the South Wales Valley has altered over time, the localised hegemonic versions of white working-class manhood still exists, despite the complete collapse of coalmining in the area. It would be a mistake to think that just because, in the occupational sense, times have changed, symbolic associations with industry have disappeared.* (p.155)

A key contribution of the study lies within its illustration of the tensions caused between opportunity for employment in a de-industrialised, neoliberal context, and the forms of masculinity associated with the region's legacy of industrial, working-class employment. For Ward, masculinity is bound within locality and socio-historic context, a context which diminishes the likelihood of the young men involved fully engaging in practices associated with the middle class in pursuit of educational success (Ball, 2003).

Although it could be argued that the development of the working-class boys' future expectations was not the primary focus of the study, Ward's research effectively shines a light on the complexity inherent in working-class young people's engagement in educational decision-making. Especially when such decisions are set within a local context where, due to socio-economic change, opportunities for 'traditional' working-class forms of employment have declined.

Although similar in geographic location to Brown's *Schooling Ordinary Boys*, Ward's writing some 28 years on charts the consequences of large-scale deindustrialisation which, at the time of Brown's writing, were just beginning to take effect.

In relation to this study's overarching research questions, Ward's research is especially useful in highlighting the tensions between hegemonic forms of working-class masculinity, and those required for 'success' in a globalised, neoliberal society. Permeated with tensions and contradictions, Ward illustrates that negotiations of masculinity, and with them future expectations, are complex and bound within the socio-historic experience of a working-class community,

As with Reay (2009), Ward points to the influence of industrial legacy on the 'collective memory' held by the working-class community. However, members of the participants' social networks such as parents and grandparents fell outside the scope of the study. It could be argued that in order to further develop upon the insights offered by Ward, data collection should engage with experiences across multiple generations.

As discussed above, in research pertaining to the educational transitions of boys in working-class communities, a tension is evident. One which lies between an economic imperative to engage in certain practices to become socially mobile, and the perception of such practices by boys in working-class communities. It is this tension

between being working-class and becoming educationally successful which Ingram's 2018 text sets out to explore.

The monograph unpicks the complex relationship between masculinities and educational success for working-class teenage boys in an urban area of Belfast. Making use of qualitative data gathered with educationally successful white working-class boys at two local schools, the study explores how participants reconcile educational success with their working-class identity.

Embedding the study within the theoretical underpinnings outlined in Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977), Ingram mobilises the concepts of capital, field and habitus to explore the complex process of negotiation and reconciliation concerning the identity of the working-class boys within the two schools. Through her reading of Bourdieu, Ingram counters criticism of the theory with regard to determinism, instead positing a schema for a generative reading of habitus which captures the incorporation of social structures and their relationship with individual agency to shape the students' schemes of perception and dispositions.

It is through the mobilisation of this theoretical framework that Ingram interrogates the relational negotiation of educational success for the working-class boys within their local, educational and socio-economic context.

The research utilises a variety of qualitative methods such as participant observation, focus groups, interviews, video elicitation (Harper, 1998), and plasticine model-making based on Gauntlett's (2007) methodological approach, in order to engage the participants within the study. Whilst the students in attendance at each school were aged 14-15 and of similar social backgrounds, the two schools selected for case-study were markedly different with the first being a secondary school, and the other a selective grammar. After situating the research locations within the wider cultural and social context of the local area, the author moves toward exploring the complexities of the participants' negotiations of educational success within their local context.

Within the study, Ingram develops Bourdieu's concept of habitus to map the (re)negotiation of the working-class participants' identities based on the experience of encountering the differing contexts of home and school. The negotiation during such an encounter is something that Ingram describes as a 'habitus tug'; a

conceptualisation of an attempt by the participants to reconfigure their habitus in (mis)alignment with the often-contradicting fields of home and school.

In a sophisticated examination of the working-class boys' negotiations of the transition between the differing fields, the author builds a typology of habitus interruptions, illustrating in detail how such a 'habitus tug' is felt by participants while they attempt to negotiate and reconcile their identity within the two differing institutions. Institutions in which differing forms of capital, and therefore habitus types, are deemed to be most legitimate.

In the text, four responses to such a tug are detailed in the form of habitus types. The *abandoned habitus* divides itself from the original field and is responsive to the structuring forces of the new field, while the *reconfirmed habitus* rejects the structuring forces of the new field and so they are not internalised. Both forms are disjunctive and leave space only for the internalisation of structures from one field. However, the *reconciled habitus* and the *destabilised habitus* are conjunctive, allowing structures from both fields to become internalised. They do so, however, with varying degrees of success. Within the text, Ingram writes of the possibility for psycho-social injury caused by a *destabilised habitus* in which a

> *person tries to incorporate the structuring forces of each field in to their habitus, but cannot achieve successful assimilation. Instead they oscillate between two dispositions and internalise conflict and division' (p.65)*

Similar to the research of Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001), Ingram frames the research in a manner which draws together the social and psychological implications of such disjuncture. Drawing on the example of a participant named Brendy (2018, p.164), Ingram illustrates how an investment in the potential benefits of educational success as a tool in which to become socially mobile, poses the risk of undesirable consequences for a working-class student's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

In doing so, the author provides a mechanism in which to develop a deeper understanding of the implications of investment in activity aligned with social mobility, on the identities of working-class students engaged in the research. A mechanism in which, through an exploration of habitus destabilisation, the risks of psychological injury inherent in some experiences of social mobility (Friedman, 2016) are highlighted.

Developing on the concept of institutional habitus used by the author and others in previous research (Horvat and Antonio, 1999; Reay, David and Ball, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Slack, 2003; Ingram, 2009), Ingram argues for an understanding of habitus as both an individual and a collective concept. Defending against criticism of institutional habitus as a '*baggy anthropomorphic label for shared expectations'* (Atkinson 2011, p.338), Ingram argues that the institution has the ability to act strongly in shaping identities within, and generate practices which confirm, institutional habitus. Using examples from Bourdieu's theoretical work, Ingram stresses the importance of mobilising habitus as a collective concept, warning that a focus solely on the individual would impose *'limitations on the habitus that render it almost useless as a sociological tool'* (p.73).

The framing of habitus by the author as a collective as well as an individual formation, although contested, provides Ingram with a robust conceptual mechanism by which to explore the intricacies of the relationship between the students and the institution of the school, adding a further layer of theoretical depth to the research. In the context of this study, the research also shines a light on the powerful role an educational institution plays in the privileging of certain educational dispositions as 'most legitimate'.

Mobilising and developing upon Bourdieu's conceptual tools, Ingram provides a nuanced insight into the relational nature of working-class boys' experiences of inequality in a neoliberal educational context. Providing complimentary evidence to that put forward by Ward, Ingram conducts a detailed analysis of the tensions and contradictions inherent in being an educationally successful working-class boy. Tensions and contradictions which have to be navigated by the participants in order for such success to be realised.

Ingram's use of theory provides an innovative means by which to conceptualise the psycho-social consequences of the pursuit of educational success for working-class boys in a contemporary context. In a contribution which aligns with the work of Friedman (2016), the study demonstrates the explanatory value of Bourdieu's intellectual framework in a 21st century context. In doing so it also demonstrates the flexibility of such a framework in capturing the dialogic engagement between the individual and the social structures which they inhabit.

Through the research explored above, it is clear the educational transitions of boys in working-class communities are far from clean and simple. Instead, the research of Willis (1977), Brown (1987), Ward (2015) and Ingram (2018) highlight their relational, structurally contingent nature. The evidence presented suggests that such transitions are negotiated in constant dialogue with social, cultural and economic resources which are both available, and deemed to be most legitimate, within a student's particular set of social conditions. It has been argued that since the late 1970's, such conditions have been subject to significant change.

As Reay argues (2009), an industrial legacy has left an imprint on the 'collective memories' of working-class communities. An imprint which, it could be argued, is a source of tension and conflict in the pursuit of an educationally successful, socially mobile trajectory. The findings discussed above also illustrate the importance of mobilising a lens of inquiry capable of capturing the geographic, temporal and relational nature of boys' educational transitions in de-industrialised working-class communities. When reflected upon in relation to discourses around HE participation, such findings also illustrate the insufficiency of individualised notions of 'aspirational deficit' (Spohrer, 2011), as an explanatory tool.

2.3 Inequality and educational decision-making

To gain a greater depth of understanding into how experiences of class-based inequality play out within an individual's conception of the possible for their future education, the following passage reviews literature which has attempted to move beyond simplistic, individualised notions of educational decision-making. Focusing on the impact of inequality within such a process, the studies shine a light on the sometimes difficult, complex negotiations individuals undertake in order to frame continued educational credentialization as achievable.

Investigating the link between occupational choice and student socio-economic status, Croll (2008) draws on data from the British Household Panel Survey to explore the implications of socio-economic inequality in occupational choice. Within the study, Croll asserts that whilst individuals from non-privileged backgrounds who were neither ambitious nor educationally successful were very unlikely to achieve well paid employment, young people from 'advantaged' backgrounds with the same level of ambition had, in a substantial minority of cases, obtained desirable jobs (p.264).

Whilst the author does not dispute the importance of choice in future decision-making, it is framed as one which is structurally contingent.

> *whilst recognising the importance of choice we can also re-characterise it as structurally contingent choice; choices which have different degrees of force in different social and educational circumstances* (p.266)

For Croll, successful navigation of a socially and mobile educational trajectory was only partially linked to an individual ambition toward such careers. Instead, the author highlights the ability of a significant minority of middle-class respondents to draw upon alternative economic, social and cultural resources to protect against undesirable occupational outcomes. Resources which individuals from less affluent, working-class backgrounds have restricted access, as described above

In an effort to glean a depth of understanding into how such structurally contingent inequalities play out in regard to future educational decision-making, Archer, Pratt and Phillips (2001) examine the construction of working-class masculinities. Drawing on data collected from an ethnically diverse group of 64 respondents who were not currently participating, or planning to participate in HE, the authors highlight the significance of masculinity. Within the text they acknowledge the need for a contemporary conceptualisation of a 'manly' identity as multiple, fluid and a process of 'becoming'. However, the authors draw out a common theme amongst the participants which underpinned their reluctance toward continued engagement in education.

The research contends that HE participation was assessed by the interviewees in terms of its effectiveness as a route to security, both in terms of graduate employment; *'Degree study was seen as a high-risk strategy with no certainty of secure employment at the end'* (p.437), and while undertaking study, *'the actual experience of being a student in itself is seen as insecure, particularly the impoverished lifestyle and financial hardship involved, the threat of loans and the risk of getting into debt'* (p.437). As well as framing continued educational engagement as a risk to financial security, Archer also highlights a perception of risk in relation to the respondents' working-class identities. The author argues that for some, HE participation could instigate a shift to the inhabitation of a middle-class arena where the working-class 'masculinity capital' held by participants is deemed to hold less legitimacy.

Whilst presenting some interesting insights, the paper illustrates the fluid and relational nature of working-class masculinity as something which is never achieved, but rather is in constant need of reconfirmation. However, it is done so from a rather traditional standpoint of a male working-class identity being that of a 'breadwinner', one which in research discussed above, is imbued with contradiction and tension within a contemporary context.

A qualitative study conducted by Burke (2007) investigates how men self-regulate in their struggle to be seen as deserving of continued engagement within education. From the thirty-eight in-depth interviews which were conducted as part of the study, laziness emerged as a characteristic which was discursively constructed as one which was essentially male. Respondents viewed laziness as posing a significant threat to their educational attainment, highlighting it as a characteristic of other male students on the course who were not achieving academically.

Whilst masculinity was viewed as privileged subject position by the students interviewed, Burke identified that some forms of femininity were useful to the men in reconstructing identities in preparation to become university students. Within the paper, Burke also highlighted how complex the negotiation of access to HE was for the men involved. For the subjects of the study, this negotiation was entangled in a complex interplay of identity, power and discourse. Counter to the prevailing discourse of aspirational deficit, the men appeared to have a strong sense of aspiration and self which, due to its complexities, meant their projects toward becoming 'worthy' of HE were permeated by fragility

In a study conducted with twenty-four young people in Kent (2012) , Steven Roberts set out to capture the 'ordinary' experiences of students participating in compulsory education. Displaying a motivation for the study similar to that posited by Brown (1987), Roberts's research offers a contemporary insight into the experiences of 'ordinary' working-class boys in education. Roberts contends that within such research there is a tendency to focus on the 'winners' and the 'losers' which leaves the middle ground relatively unexplored.

Rather than an anti-school subculture being prevalent amongst the group of male students in working-class communities highlighted in early educational research (Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghail, 1994), the study suggested that a degree of ambivalence

characterised the educational experience of the respondents. Whilst students participating in the study saw at least some effort at school to be of social and moral worth and never became completely alienated, eventually they moved into low level work which was unrelated to their educational engagement.

For the group studied, Roberts suggests that rather than education being perceived as an opportunity to achieve upward social mobility, education was simply recognised as a normal part of the transition to adulthood. Participation in education was not seen by the participants as something that would be of a significance to their future, rather it was seen as something that people that were simply required to do. As such, ambivalence with regard to the young men's participation in education, which promoted neither a sense of resistance, or particular enjoyment, was the defining characteristic of this group's experience.

It is clear to see that, through resistance or ambivalence, the way that some groups of young men act may have a negative impact on the formation of their future educational/occupational intentions. According to other research, through a rejection of 'laziness' or the adoption of neoliberal values, boys may act in a way that has a positive impact upon their chances of accessing HE. However, in the pieces of research focusing on a group who are actively working toward the creation of a socially mobile educational trajectory, the fragility of their project is highlighted. Both in Ward's (2015) research in a Welsh mining village, and Burke's (2007) in a London borough, the pressure that the participants are under to act in a traditional classed manner is clear, and the risks involved in becoming 'worthy' of HE participation made apparent.

As exemplified in studies investigating boys' educational transitions in de-industrialised working-class communities, academic endeavour suggests that there is a dislocation between attributes which are privileged as legitimate in an educational trajectory aligned to HE participation, and the ease in which they can be accessed and mobilised by working-class individuals. Findings presented below illustrate that such tensions are not just present within the identities of working-class individuals, but also within the educational environments which they inhabit.

In Nicola Ingram's (2009) study of institutional habitus in two Northern Irish schools, a potential disjuncture between the identity of the white working-class students, and that privileged by the school as most legitimate, is presented. Ingram contends that

working-class students within the institution faced a *'lack of recognition of their cultural background, and can come under pressure to conform to middle-class attitudes and dispositions through discourse on 'appropriate' language, behaviour and taste'* (p.432). The findings of this research suggest that the dispositions deemed most appropriate within a school, and those held by white working-class students did not always operate in synchronicity.

Ingram highlights a possible conflict between the perceived legitimacy of social and cultural capitals held by white working-class students, and the largely middle-class capitals valued by the educational institution. As such capitals are drawn upon to form dispositions toward educational success, the author argues that for the white working-class participants, an additional layer of tension is created within the setting of a school.

Such findings are mirrored in the monograph *Urban Youth and Schooling: the experiences and identities of educationally at risk* young people (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010a. Within the research, it became apparent that students from working-class backgrounds '*were painfully aware that they were 'looked down on' by society'* (p.35) and were experiencing first-hand the symbolic violence inherent within their class position. As a response to this, students invested value in alternative spaces such as the streets in their locality, or the clothes that they wore, using their appearance as a means for generating capital.

As highlighted by Ingram's study, the spaces in which the working-class students found and developed value were often in direct conflict with those deemed acceptable within the comparatively middle-class environment the school. This was reflected by the responses of staff in the research by Archer et al. who spoke of the local estate; *'the problems of poverty on 'the estate' were not issues 'out there' but were bought in to schools with the young people'* (2010, p.28). In the eyes of the teachers, the estate was posed as something that was inherently problematic.

For the students who were taking part in the study, discourses of being happy and staying safe featured heavily. The authors describe that for the students involved, *'educational failure was a constant threat and they were genuinely unsure as to how they might fare in the examination'* (2010, p.96). Such anxiety, it was contended, meant that many of the working-class students decided to 'wait and see' with regard

to their future, making plans only in the short term. Longer term planning was perceived as risky, as committing to a goal before their exam results were known could pose a significant threat to their safety through insecurity. Being in a position whereby they were forced to 'play the game' in this manner meant that a number of the students resisted seeking advice from official sources such as the career service Connexions:

> *This placed them at a disadvantage because they lacked the relevant knowledge, information and cultural capital about how to navigate the educational system and tended to lose out when it came to playing the aspirations game (2010, p.96)*

It is clear from the findings of research by Ingram and Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick that conflict between the cultures of school and the local community in working-class contexts had a discernible impact on students' chances of future educational success. The studies also illustrate how experiences of inequality increase a perception of risk associated with investment in activity to become educationally successful.

By way of comparison, research by Davey (2012) illustrates that within a more middle-class context, the cultural contexts of home and school are in much closer alignment. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of *doxa,* the author examines classed practices in an English fee-paying school:

> *Through the relationship between Grayshott Grammar and the parents who pay its fees we see a very distinctive classed practice, with, above all, the fee-paying school a signal of their middle classness to others. To be a parent at Grayshott Grammar is to become part of a middle-class environment, through its ostentatious displays of class-coded culture (p.523)*

In the paper, Davey describes how, during a parents' evening at the school, the Headteacher describes *'A-Levels as currency in the great sweetie shop that is UCAS'* (p.514). Within the middle-class environment of the institution, the assumption of progression to an elite university was taken for granted. Through their investment in practices aligned to the *institutional doxa,* Davey presents the middle-class parents as *'fish in water'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127), with dispositions aligning to those of the institution. As such, they were able to make full use of available

mechanisms to accrue and mobilise capital, thereby increasing the chances of their offspring gaining entry to a prestigious university.

Considering the research discussed above, it would appear that the ability by which the forms of capital held by a working-class student, and those deemed to be most legitimate for eventual HE participation, can operate in synchronicity has specific implications for their future in education and work.

In a 2002 paper on decision-making by working-class students from minority ethnic backgrounds, Ball et.al examined the process whereby participants drew on social, cultural and economic resource to inform future educational choices. Rather than future HE decision-making being an individualised endeavour with aspiration as a key determinant, the authors present the process as one which took place in relational engagement with the social, historical and familial context in which it was made. Through their exploration of the data, the authors present a typology of HE decision-making (2002, p.337).

Contingent Chooser	***Embedded Chooser***
Finance is a key concern and constraint *Choice uses minimal information* *Choice is distant or 'unreal'* *Few variables are called up* *Minimal support (social capital) is used* *Ethnic mix is an active variable in choosing* *Choosing is short term and weakly linked to 'imagined futures' – part of an incomplete of incoherent narrative* *First-time choosers with no family tradition of higher education*	*Finance is not an issue* *Choice is based on extensive and diverse sources of information* *Choice is part of a cultural script, a 'normal biography'* *A diverse array of variables are deployed* *Choice is specialist/detailed* *Extensive support (social capital) is mobilised* *Ethnic mix is marginal or irrelevant to choice* *Choosing is long-term and often relates to vivid and extensive 'imagined futures'*

Narrowly defined socioscapes and spatial horizons – choices are 'local'/distance is a friction *Parents as 'onlookers' or 'weak framers'/ mothers may give practical support on families making the choice*	*– part of a coherent and planned narrative* *'Followers' embedded in a 'deep grammar of aspiration' which makes higher education normal and necessary* *Broad socioscapes and social horizons – choices are 'national'/ distance is not an issue* *Parents are strong framers and active participants in choice*

Table 1: Typology of HE decision-making (Ball, Reay and David, 2002)

Ball, Reay and David describe the notion of HE participation as either an *embedded* or a *contingent* choice depending on the forms of relevant social, cultural and economic capital made available to the individual choice-maker. Those largely working-class individuals with little access to relevant forms of capital are described by the authors as *contingent choosers* for whom

> *going to university involves them becoming a person different from the rest their family and many of their peers, in eschewing a 'normal biography' and at the same time risking a sense of feeling themselves 'out of place" (*p.352)

It is argued that such individuals were not endowed with access to the forms of capital required to easily plan an educational trajectory in alignment with HE participation. Should a *contingent chooser* engage inactivity to accrue capital toward such an ambition, it was argued that they also risked possible alienation by following a course which deviated from that of their friends and family members.

On the other hand, for *embedded choosers,* the authors assert:

> *Going to higher education is a natural progression, part of a well-established 'normal biography'. Cultural and social capital are in good supply and make the process of choosing into a vivid experience that is set in relation to longer-term planning and expectations. Costs are not an issue, working in term time is not expected, and is often actively discouraged by*

> *parents. Moving away from home is seen by many as part of the experience of higher education and these students were the only ones to talk about 'extra-curricular' activities at university. They know what to expect and what opportunities they might take advantage of (p.353)*

For these largely middle-class students, continuing to university is presented as a 'natural progression'. Due to their own educational experiences, parents of *embedded choosers* were likely to frame HE participation strongly, actively engaging in supporting the process of university 'choice-making'. Whilst for *contingent choosers* there was a focus on short-term planning similar to that described earlier (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010a), *embedded choosers* were able to confidently plan for long-term outcomes due to the advantages bestowed by their privileged access to relevant capital.

Authors such as Ward (2015) and Ingram (2009;2018) have highlighted a tension between dispositions held by white working-class boys linked to a community's industrial legacy, and those which are privileged as key to securing good employment in an individualised, neoliberal socio-economic context. Although the research engages with ethnic minority groups as opposed to the white working class, the paper by Ball, Reay and David (2002) shines a light on the possible consequences of such a disjuncture in relation to HE participation. Indeed, within the writing, it is highlighted that many of the facets of inequality contributing to framing of HE as an unlikely trajectory are class-based:

> *Essentially, the 'contingent'/'embedded' division is class based. For those represented here as 'contingent choosers', the decision to attend university and obtain a degree has a specific class 'meaning', in addition to, and interwoven with its implications for ethnic identity (p.352)*

If such a statement rings true, it could be argued that within research exploring the educational expectations of white working-class boys, the theoretical contribution of Ball et.al offers a robust mechanism by which to understand a number of the multiple barriers in access to HE which white working-class students face.

Research has also suggested that the tensions and difficulties permeating working-class students' process of decision-making also have psycho-social implications for their experience of study within HE (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003; Reay,

Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). Such implications relate to a working-class students' sense of belonging when entering new, predominately middle-class educational institutions; and how the impact of 'successful' navigation may hold undesirable consequences in the maintenance of existing relationships with working-class family members and friends.

Indeed, in Keane's 2011 study, the question of how working-class students may act in a university environment where middle-class values dominate is explored. Keane introduces a study undertaken with forty-five working-class students, investigating the negotiation of significant socio-cultural disjunction with regard to their dispositions, and that which were privileged as most legitimate within the university.

Keane found that the working-class students used distancing as a form of self-protection against the dominant habitus of the institution which was regarded as 'other'. By taking part in practices which separated themselves from the middle-class students, and strategically downplaying any marker of their own class background, Keane found that the students avoided social fixing but also suffered hidden injury as a result. It was argued that the performance of behaviours which led to social closure limited the opportunity of this group of working-class students to build social capital and, as a result, caused their experience of HE to be less equitable than that of their middle-class counterparts.

It is clear from the studies discussed above that the social, cultural and economic resources made available for working-class students to accrue and mobilise in pursuit of a socially mobile educational trajectory significantly impacts their educational decision-making. It is also clear that tensions between working-class identities and middle-class educational institutions can negatively influence chances of working-class students accruing the social and cultural resources deemed to be 'most legitimate' for successful entry to university.

Whilst important contributions have highlighted the influence of family in the re/production of educational inequality (Vincent et al., 2015; Gillies, 2006; Reay, 2005; Lawler, 2000; Reay and Ball, 1998), there has been limited literature published which seeks to engage family and community within research specifically related to future educational decision-making. As illustrated in the discussion of boys' educational transitions in working-class communities, a student's framing of their 'possible' future

in education and work is geographically, socially and historically contingent. Indeed the analysis of research by Willis (1977), Brown (1987), Ward (2015) and Ingram (2019) highlights how *'shared values transmitted across and practiced within generations'* (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011, p.140) influence choices made in the present. It suggests that for white working-class boys, future decision-making is a process which is fluid, relational and shaped by a collective memory spanning multiple generations of engagement in education and employment.

Although the importance of such considerations are presented in discussions around class-based inequality and educational decision-making, similar to that found by Fuller, Heath and Johnston (2011, p.139), the literature examined has focused largely on data collection with the individual. If, as Ball, Reay and David (2002) assert, *"contingent' choosers are planning a biography that involves a kind of break with family and class'* (p.354), then it could be argued a methodological device focusing solely on the individual 'choice-maker' limits opportunity to explore the relational influence of family and community.

In an attempt to provide a greater depth of understanding into how the relationship between working-class students and those individuals who they are closest to influences the framing of possible educational futures, Fuller, Heath and Johnston (2011) turn the lens of focus to the role of social networks:

> *decisions about participating in HE are embedded in social networks. The importance of developing social capital as part of education decision-making is critical, here, and it is vital to understand both the importance of bounding capital in network maintenance and the necessity of bridging and linking capitals in extending 'horizons for action'* (p. 136)

Conducting the study within a qualitative methodological framework which encompassed core participants' family and friends, the authors explored *'the extent to which network dispositions and attitudes are reproduced across and within generations'* (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011, p.140). Taking such an approach added a temporal dimension to the study, encompassing experiences of educational transitions made at different times and within differing socio-economic contexts:

> *Navigating the transition from education to work or career transitions in the contemporary labour market, where entry to many sectors and*

> *progression within many careers is dependant on the possession of higher level credentials, is in stark contrast to the wide availability of jobs and the much looser 'job getting' criteria that were available to school leavers who are now in their fifties and sixties* (p.141)

Similar to the findings of Ward's research (2015) examining the educational transitions of young men in a de-industrialised Welsh town, through their engagement with the social network Fuller et.al articulate the impact of socio-economic change on HE decision-making. As many of the participants made their educational transitions at a time when the UK labour market looked markedly different, the authors argue that the members of the participants' network were left ill equipped to provide advice and guidance about educational trajectory aligned to HE participation in a contemporary context.

The insight provided by Fuller et.al provides an alternative, temporal lens through which to appreciate the complexity of experiences of inequality in educational decision-making. When combined with the contributions of other authors presented at different stages throughout this discussion, the oppressive nature of class-based inequality on such a process becomes apparent.

The research argues that for many working-class students forming future intentions for education and work, committing to an educational future aligned with HE participation can be a risky enterprise. Such a perception of risk, it is argued, is not born from an individualised 'aspirational deficit', but rather the effects of structurally embedded inequality which have restricted the framing of HE participation to an abstract possibility for many working-class students. It is argued that, for many students, engaging in activity aligned with HE participation involves the negotiation of a multiplicity of tensions and contradictions which are experienced in relational engagement with their social, geographic and temporal context.

2.4 Examining white working-class boys' future educational expectations within a contemporary context

The literature presented within this section provides a contextual foundation of scholarly exploration into class-based inequality and educational transitions of boys in working-class communities. It has also explored the role of inequality in future educational decision-making, demonstrating the complexities of 'choice-making' in an

environment where access to the forms of social, cultural and economic capital required to frame HE participation as possible are restricted.

In the opening section, the review situated the study within wider discourses related to whiteness, the white working class and educational inequality more broadly. As asserted within the introductory section, 'white working-class' or 'white disadvantaged' have been terms regularly mobilised by policy makers and the media in relation to unequal access to HE for the group. However, it has been argued that often such terminology has been appropriated to situate the white working class within a narrative of cultural deficit (Lawler, 2012; McDowell, 2012; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012; Gillborn, 2010).

The examination of scholarly endeavour provided a historical foundation to contemporary experiences of educational inequality for the white working class, demonstrating the harmful effects of media and political discourse surrounding the group. Research illustrated how the implications of narratives of individualised deficit are carried within the collective memory of the white working class. Something which in a neoliberal society, it was contended (Reay, 2009), created a fundamental barrier to the group succeeding educationally. The findings discussed provided an initial insight into the intersectional nature of experiences of inequality for the white working class, highlighting the insufficiency and possibly harmful implications of discourses aligned to cultural deficit. Within the context of widening access to HE, it could be argued that a narrative of a 'poverty of aspiration' is an example of such discourse.

Turning the lens of focus to an examination of boys' educational transitions in working-class communities, the review explored the socio-historic influence of an industrial legacy on the educational/occupational trajectories of white working-class males. Mobilising monographs by Willis (1977), Brown (1987), Ward (2015) and Ingram (2018) as a foundation on which to base the discussion, the section highlighted how de-industrialisation and the rise of neoliberalism created tensions and contradictions within the educational experiences of white working-class males. Tensions which, it was argued, had direct implications for the participants transitions into further education and work.

Rather than the negotiation of such transitions being a choice which was clean and simple, the research demonstrated their complex, relational nature. It was contended

that they were bound within an industrial legacy which misaligned with the demands of a neoliberal economy, having significant consequences for those attempting to navigate a route into well paid work. The work of Ingram in particular, through its innovative mobilisation of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, demonstrated the psycho-social implications of class-based inequality for participants deemed to be 'educationally successful'.

Within the context of this study, the findings presented illustrate the importance of mobilising conceptual and methodological tools capable of capturing educational experiences which are relational, structurally contingent and geographically situated. Such literature reiterates the insufficiency of 'aspirational deficit' (Spohrer, 2011) as a device to adequately explain the embedded, historical implications of inequality for the development of white working-class boys' future educational expectations.

Although research on the educational transitions of boys in working-class communities demonstrated a misalignment between the facets of their identity linked to an industrial legacy, and those required to become 'successful' in a de-industrialised, neoliberal society, the focus of such research was not exclusively directed toward to the negotiation of future expectations for HE participation. Indeed, there was a gap in the literature when it came to inequality and future educational decision-making with a specific focus on white working-class boys.

It is this gap with specific regard to the ability by which the study's core participants accessed, accrued and mobilised social and cultural resources to form future educational expectations, that the research questions (p.57) posited by this study are formulated to address.

However, within the review there was a plethora of academic endeavour related to educational decision-making and class-based inequality in a broader sense. Such literature attempted to move beyond simplistic, individualised notions of educational 'choice', instead focusing on the impact of inequality in the process of framing access to HE as possible.

It described the consequences of a misalignment in the cultural, social and economic resources held by working-class individuals, and those deemed to be 'most legitimate' in order to engage in a socially mobile trajectory. Research (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Ingram, 2009) demonstrated the implications of such a misalignment

at an institutional level, with conflict causing a strong perception of risk in committing to an educational trajectory aligned with academic success. In comparison, Davey's (2012) paper highlighted the advantage bestowed on individuals in an elite educational institution where class-based identities operated in synchronicity.

The concept of *contingent* and *embedded* choosers presented by Ball, Reay and David (2002), provide a mechanism by which to articulate such experiences of inequality in educational decision-making. Through the mobilisation of such an explanatory tool, a means is provided to explore the historic implications of structural inequality in future educational decision-making for working-class students.

The constituent sections of this review have a clear underlying theme. Each suggests that in order to capture the multifaceted nature of inequalities facing white working-class boys in the negotiation of their future expectations, a model is required which encompasses the influence of their social, geographic and temporal location. Within such a context, Fuller, Heath and Johnston (2011) would argue that methodological choices need to provide space to capture the relational nature of such considerations. To address this gap, a methodological framework for this study is presented in Chapter 3, providing a mechanism to capture and examine such complexity through engagement with WMHS staff and members of the participants' wider network.

Through the evidence presented, a greater depth of understanding has been gleaned into the importance of social class, gender, geography and history within white working-class boys' negotiations of their future educational expectations. An understanding which has proved instrumental to the development of the study's overarching research questions:

- How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?
- How do white working-class males draw upon the resources to available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?
- How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?

It also highlighted a gap in the literature relating to the process of educational decision-making for white working-class males specifically. While there has been a wealth of studies examining the white working class and experiences of inequality in education more broadly, there is little published research on how white working-class boys draw on available social, cultural and economic resources to inform a perception of the 'possible' for their educational futures.

Building and extending on the research examined in the literature review, the questions above are designed to develop understanding by engaging not just with white working-class boys, but also with the educational institution which they inhabit and members of their social networks whose intergenerational experience may serve to influence the formation of their future expectations. It is this focus, which provides a mechanism for the study to make a unique contribution to the current cannon of scholarly endeavour in this field.

To achieve its aim in understanding how core participants drew on available resources within their specific geographic, social and historical context, certain conceptual and methodological choices aligned to the objective have been made. Through the deployment of such mechanisms, the study aimed to capture the relational, intergenerational, structurally contingent nature of the boys' educational decision-making. A study scaffolded around the research questions provided above offers the opportunity to build upon previous research, furthering understanding of how educational 'choices' were made by participants within a de-industrialised town in the Black Country.

2.5 Bourdieu's Theoretical Toolkit

Within the body of literature related to educational success and inequality, a number of different approaches have been taken in an attempt to examine the issues faced by white working-class males in 21st century Britain. For many of the academics whose research features in the literature review, the studies have been conducted with aim of shining a light on the hidden structural mechanisms perpetuating the reproduction of educational inequality and injustice. As such, many of the academics discussed have located their studies within a theoretical framework which provides opportunity to embrace the relational nature of individual agency and social structure.

For two of arguably the most influential academics conducting research into social inequality and education, Stephen Ball (1998; 2003; 2005) and Diane Reay (Reay, 2017; Reay *et al.,* 2007; Reay, 2004; Reay and Wiliam, 1999), one of the largest influences in their development of a method by which to examine the lived experience of identity in education has been the work of French sociologist Piere Bourdieu.

Born in a rural area of southwest France in 1930, Piere Bourdieu graduated from the distinguished École Normale Supérieure, Paris, after studying philosophy. In a career spanning nearly fifty years he conducted empirical research in a range of different subject areas including education, kinship, ritual, and the political elite before turning his attention toward the development of a paradigm which aimed to bridge the gap between the opposing forces of structuralist and constructivist social theory.

First introduced in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), the conceptual trio of capital, habitus and field are arguably Bourdieu's largest contribution to the development of a method to understand the sometimes opaque means by which power and inequality are reproduced within social contexts. Following further refinement in his later work (1990; 1992; 1998a; 2000), the concepts have become widely mobilised within educational research.

In *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory,* Grenfell and James (1998) present Bourdieu's model as one which frames social spaces as 'structuring structures'. Within these spaces resides a heterogeneous relationship between the individuals located within the structure, and the social structure itself. An agent's ability to actively shape a structure, while at the same time being shaped by it, is a central concern in Bourdieu's theoretical work.

In order to explore how such relationships between a structure and the agents residing within it may be examined, Bourdieu developed three theoretical tools within his work as a means by which to operationalise theory in the practice of social research. The first of which is the concept of habitus:

> *Habitus encapsulates social action through dispositions and can be broadly explained as the evolving process through which individuals act, think, perceive and approach the world and their role in it. Habitus thus denotes a way of being. Moreover, as assimilated past without a clear consciousness, habitus is an internal archive of personal experiences*

> *rooted in the distinct aspects of individuals' social journeys* (Costa and Murphy, 2015, p.7)

In other words, the habitus of an individual is the internal embodiment of their past, informing the dispositions which they bring to bear in different social settings. An agent's habitus is not something that has been consciously constructed, but rather is an archive of past experiences which works to shape the way in which they negotiate their day-to-day lives. According to Bourdieu, the habitus isn't static, but rather is fluid in nature and constantly evolving as individuals structure, and are in turn structured, by the fields in which they operate.

The second concept, and one which Bourdieu describes as the building blocks of the individual habitus, is that of capital:

> *Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form, or in its 'incorporated' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, allows them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is a vis-insta, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a lex-insta, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. It is what makes games of the society – not least the economic game- something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle (Bourdieu, 1986, p.81)*

While researchers utilising Bourdieu's notion of capital have developed a number of adaptions of the tool to tighten the focus on areas of research such as 'black' cultural capital (Wallace, 2015), linguistic capital (Silver, 2005) and emotional capital (Zembylas, 2007; Gillies, 2006), this study mobilises the concept using the social, cultural and economic forms of capital as outlined in Bourdieu's description (1986). Within the study, such capitals take the form of resources which the participants either had access to, or could mobilise, when making decisions about their future in education. In short, what they knew, who they knew, and what they could afford. Whilst sharpening the focus of capital into a specific form such as that of emotion has exploratory value, for this particular piece of research it was important to develop an understanding of how the access to, and mobilisation of economic, social and cultural

capital worked relationally when the participants negotiated their future expectations to create 'the *field of the possibles'* (Bourdieu, 1984, p.110).

For Bourdieu, the accumulation of capital by an individual enables them to 'play the game' of a particular field. This unconscious investment by individuals playing the game and its stakes, i.e. the symbolic capital afforded to the victors, is described by Bourdieu as *illusio (1998a, p.77):*

> *The almost miraculous encounter between the habitus and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near-perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the concrete configurations on the pitch or board. Produced by experience of the game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out, the 'feel for the game' is what gives the game a subjective sense - a meaning and a raison d'etre, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake (this is illusio in the sense of investment in the game and the outcome, interest in the game, commitment to the presuppositions - doxa - of the game)* (1990, p.66)

Bourdieu introduces the field as a site which is inextricably linked to that of habitus and capital. The field is a space that has a *doxa*, a set of rules whereby agents can legitimately act. The *doxa* of the field is one that is shaped by, and is a product of, its history and the dominant agents acting within it. Fields are sites in which agents deploy symbolic capital, both material and embodied, to strive for a position within its structure. However, fields are not static sites. Fields, like the habitus, are subject to continual change as they are structured through their relation to the agents operating within them.

For Bourdieu, how successfully agents are able to negotiate the field in which they reside depends on their 'feel for the game'. In *Practical Reason* (1988), Bourdieu gives the example of a tennis player who is about to return a serve. A good tennis player does not have to consciously decide on how hard to swing the racket when returning the shot, neither will they deliberate on where to place the return as the ball comes hurtling toward them. Instead they will subconsciously bring into play the training they have received, making a split-second decision on how to act. For agents endowed

with the appropriate dispositions within their habitus, their action in a field becomes second nature, unconsciously deploying symbolic capital in a way which maximises their chances for a desirable outcome.

Within the literature review, an example of such seamless synchronicity within an educational context is provided by Davey's (2012) mobilisation of the concept of *doxa.* In the independent school where the study is located, the author provides a pertinent example of how the alignment of habitus and field align to (re)produce educational advantage amongst the middle-class attendees.

However, Bourdieu also asserts that within fields the rules of the game, due to the relational nature of their development in dialogue with those who inhabit social space, are subject to constant shift. At times the shift results in a disjuncture, or 'structural lag', occurring between opportunities present within the field, and the dispositions required in order to grasp them (Bourdieu, 1977, p.83). This 'structural lag' is what Bourdieu terms *hysteresis.* Hardy argues (2008, p.131) that such a shift in the objective conditions of the field can lead to dislocation between the capital held by individuals, and those which are objectively positioned as most valuable. If we use the example of a tennis player who had only learned to play the game in accordance with rules set out at the sport's inception, they would be at a significant disadvantage during a modern-day tournament.

In the introductory section of this thesis, the impact of recent socio-economic change on working-class communities in the Black Country was described. As highlighted by the work of Ward (2015), such change has significant consequences for young white working-class men in de-industrialised working-class communities. Through concepts such as *hysteresis,* Bourdieu's theoretical framework offers a way in which to articulate such change, illustrating how a shift in 'the rules of the game' impacts upon the opportunity afforded to those actors who are not bestowed with the symbolic forms of capital required to make a seamless transition.

Through the mobilisation of habitus, capital and field, Bourdieu offers a theoretical formula in which to conceptualise social practice *'[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice'* (1984, p.101). For Bourdieu, in order to understand practice, it is how these tools work in continual dialogue which facilitates an understanding of the complex interplays of power which take place within the social world.

In recent years, a new generation of scholars have mobilised the work of Pierre Bourdieu, developing his intellectual legacy within contemporary social research (Thatcher *et al.,* 2015), demonstrating its continued relevance to our understanding of present-day social contexts. Whilst in a recent edited collection by Diane Reay (2019), the presented collection of selected papers demonstrates the flexibility and usefulness of Bourdieu's theoretical toolbox for contemporary social and educational research practice.

While researchers in education have used Bourdieu's theoretical toolbox to study the interaction of agents with the structures in which they operate, and drawn insightful conclusions from their findings, Bourdieu's paradigm is not free from criticism. Sullivan (2002) argues that Bourdieu's theoretical construct is overly deterministic, leaving little room for human agency; a sentiment mirrored by Nentwich et al. (2015). McRobbie (2002) argues that Bourdieu's conceptual framework lacks reflexivity as a sociological tool, and doesn't allow for conscious deliberation. Although, as mentioned above, it was Bourdieu's intention to develop a paradigm to bridge the gap between structuralist and constructivist theoretical standpoints, the argument from certain schools of thought in social research would be that a relationship between unconscious disposition and conscious reflexive deliberation is still fraught with tension.

However, for those academics who are critical of Bourdieu's paradigm regarding the perceived lack of space for reflexive action, there are others who are keen to point out the limitations of certain theories of reflexivity. Through a critical examination of the work of Foucault and Butler, McNay (1999) argues that there is a failure to properly take into account issues of embeddedness in gender identity. Further, McNay argues that such a failure may have led to an overemphasis on the expressive opportunities emergent as a result of the process of deindustrialization. In order to compensate for such perceived limitations in reflexivity, McNay turns to Bourdieu.

For McNay, the concept of habitus and its relational nature engagement with the field, offers a potential means by which to develop an understanding of the embedded elements within gender identity. It is noted by McNay however, that in Bourdieu's work an analytical mechanism that sufficiently addresses the relationship of the habitus with a field's *doxa*, and the reflexive deliberation that may occur should the habitus of an individual be fully ingratiated, is notably absent. Providing the example of a woman

returning to the workplace after giving birth, McNay argues that the space between habitus and *doxa* creates an opportunity for resistance, an assertion that goes some way to contesting criticisms with regard to determinism levelled at Bourdieu's paradigm.

In some ways the work of McNay offers an initial foray into an attempt to reconcile Bourdieu's theories with that of conscious reflexive deliberation; a challenge that has since been taken up by social theorists such as Adams (2006), Sayer (2005) and Elder-Vass (2007).

In his paper *Hybridizing Habitus and Reflexivity: Towards and Understanding of Contemporary Identity?,* Adams (2006) summarises the critical debate regarding the habitus and reflexivity. The paper examines attempts from a variety of thinkers (Adkins, 2003; Sweetman, 2003; McNay, 1999) to hybridize two seemingly oppositional tools, in order to move past what he terms a 'conceptual stalemate'. Whilst Adams does not break any new conceptual ground within the article, he nonetheless succinctly articulates the need for a more complex understanding of the relationship between habitus and field. Without this, it is argued, a sociology inspired by the work of Bourdieu cannot truly offer an alternative vision of practice.

Following such a call, Sayer, in his book *The Moral Significance of Class* (2005), acknowledges the usefulness of Bourdieu's concepts as tools with which to shine a light on issues pertaining to class, race and gender. However, he argues it is oft expected to carry far too heavy an explanatory burden. For Sayer, a much greater level of work needs to be done after using such a model in unearthing complex issues that the discipline of sociology alone may not be equipped to deal with.

However, *'to abandon the concept of habitus because Bourdieu exaggerates its influence would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. No other sociological concept can help us understand the embodied character of dispositions, their generative power and their relation to the wider social field. The difficult question is how far to invoke it'* (p.50). In his monograph, Sayer points to values such as cares, commitments and concerns which have an emotional dimension as those which habitus alone would only have limited explanatory power.

Elder-Vass's (2007) paper offers a way to reconcile Archer's morphogenetic theory of reflexive action (1982; 2007) with Bourdieu through an emergentist theory of action.

In the article, the main thrust of Elder Vass's argument is that Bourdieu had only articulated his theoretical position very loosely and, as such, Bourdieu's work can be 'recast into an emergentist framework without losing its inherent structure or strengths' (p.326). In doing so Elder-Vass selects examples from Bourdieu's later work where Bourdieu discuses habitus having 'blips' or critical moments where it misfires, and individuals may slip into a form of conscious reflexivity (p.200). Elder-Vass uses this slightly fuzzy position as a vehicle to provide justification for an emergentist theory.

Through a discussion surrounding conscious and unconscious deliberation in action, Elder-Vass argues against the assertion that conscious reflection only takes place in moments of crises in the habitus and instead implies that 'some parts of our actions can be determined more or less unconsciously whereas others are determined as a consequence of conscious, and perhaps rational, decision-making' (p.341). In doing so, Elder-Vass provides the example of shaping our mouth to speak with an accent as unconscious deliberation as unproblematic, whilst deciding which way to turn when going to a place which we've never visited would engage in a level of reflexive decision-making that would not rely simply on predetermined disposition. He argues it is at that stage that consciousness must be invoked to 'provide a decision that will complete a set of dispositions required to determine the action to be implemented' (p.341). As part of his concluding remarks in the paper Elder-Vass argues *'in short, that we can explain the powers of human individuals without explaining them away'* (p.344). Consequently, he posits that such an emergentist theory of action provides a conceptual middle ground that accommodates both conscious deliberation and action generated by unconscious disposition.

In Margaret Archer's (2010) paper *Routine, Reflexivity and Realism,* a robust argument is mounted against what she views as 'conflationist' theoretical work regarding reflexivity and the habitus. During the article there has been limited literature published which seeks to engage family and community, Archer critiques the aforementioned writing by Sayer and Elder-Vass, alongside work by Fleetwood (2008). Using her own writings on morphogenesis as a foundation, she contests that the attempts of 'empirical combination', 'hybridization' and 'ontological and theoretical reconciliation' have been largely unsuccessful.

Archer asserts that much of the writing critiqued, especially that by Elder-Vass, is based on a misreading of both her own and Bourdieu's literature, and as a result points to what she considers to be significant flaws in their attempts to overcome the theoretical tensions underlying the two conceptual positions. In the concluding remarks of the paper Archer also questions the relevance of Bourdieu's work in the late 20th and early 21st century, implying that habitus is perhaps an insufficient tool for analysis of a post-industrial capitalist society.

However, it cannot be ignored that Archer mounts such a critique from the base of the author's own theoretical model and, for the last twenty-five years (1993), has been dismissive of the relevance of Bourdieu's paradigm. Through a critical analysis of Archer's internal conversations, Farrugia and Woodman (2015) explore and test how Bourdieu tackles the subject of social change.

Within the text, they contend that a cognitive reflexivity which excludes embodied dispositions is problematic in an analytical capacity and can result in a narrative to social change which lacks depth. Rather than being deterministic as is posited by Archer, Farrugia and Woodman argue that disposition 'draws necessary critical attention to the profound personal investments that constitute the conditions for subjectivity' (p.642). They also contest that paying attention to unconscious disposition is not only analytically necessary but is central in its role to forming an understanding of how the possibilities for people to flourish are bound by contradictions in structure and inequality.

Through the critique of Archer's theoretical writing, Farrugia and Woodman competently illustrate the importance of the dispositions constituent in the habitus as providing an analytic tool in which to explore the complex relationship of the individual to their social setting. Although the article is heavily critical of Archer's work, it does not do so in a way that dismisses reconciliation of structure/agency or the conscious/unconscious in a relational manner. Rather the article suggests that to simply reject the notion of unconscious disposition out of hand will ignore structural relationships within analysis and only lead to a superficial narrative of social change.

Written slightly before the intellectual 'to and fro' with regard to structure and agency discussed above, a paper by Dillabough (2004) explores Bourdieu's work with a particular focus on gender and education. Alongside McNay (1999), Dillabough

presents Bourdieu's work as a focused and generative attempt to map issues of domination and subordination within the realms of self-hood, particularly with regard to gender. In the passage, Dillabough describes the use of a Bourdieusian paradigm in the study of gender as one in which the self is '*bound by social conditions rather than determined by them'* (p.498).

In other words, Dillabough asserts that, rather than being dismissed as deterministic, Bourdieu's paradigm does an important job in the endowment of *'subjects with the capacity to act in the social world without claiming a totalizing agency or an illusory, essentialist notion of freedom'* (p.498). Similarly, when describing the mobilisation of Bourdieu's paradigm in educational research in Northern Irish schools, Ingram (2018) posits a generative, rather than deterministic reading of Bourdieu which

> *does not reduce it to a mechanistic theory of human action where structure produces habitus produces structure in an endless and unchanging cycle. The habitus incorporates structures through experiences within the normal world. These incorporated structures interact dialogically with agency in order to generate schemes of perception and dispositions. (2018, p.58)*

For Ingram, agency does not exist outside of incorporated structures, but rather is shaped by them in constant dialogic engagement. Through this engagement, schemes of perception and action are constantly generated by an individual's lived experiences within the world. Within the research, the generative framing of Bourdieu's habitus adds a layer of depth to the study, enabling the author to unpick complex negotiations of identity for the working-class students negotiating educational success in the setting of a middle-class school.

Indeed, Friedman comments (2016) that within Bourdieu's later work there is also a recognition that it is a dialogic engagement between structure and agency that generates movement between social fields causing a disruption to the habitus in which it is 'cleft'. Recent academic endeavour has mobilised a generative reading of Bourdieu to chart the effects of social mobility on the habitus (Ingram, 2018; Friedman, 2016; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013). Endeavour which, it could be argued, contest criticisms over determinism by its mobilisation in research practice, highlighting the adaptability of Bourdieu's conceptual framework as important thinking tools in contemporary social research.

With regard to studying the inequalities inherent in class, race and gender in education, the explanatory value of a paradigm such as Bourdieu's is clear. For a researcher with an interest in exploring such matters, the notion of a framework which allows for an in-depth study of the relationship between the individual, and the structures in which they reside, is greatly appealing. However, if a researcher is to do so, they must also be aware of its possible limitations. As has been discussed in this section, Bourdieu's model is not one which 'sits still' and its effectiveness, as with any social theory, is open to critique, challenge and debate.

In the studies of white working-class male students within the literature review, there is a clear undercurrent of emotional response, both to being positioned as working-class (Skeggs, 2009), and in becoming socially mobile (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). Recent research mobilising a generative reading of Bourdieu (Reay, 2019; Ingram, 2018; Thatcher *et al.,* 2015; Friedman, 2016) has also demonstrated that social mobility, and its implications for those striving to achieve it, can be incorporated into a robust theoretical framework for enquiry into present-day educational inequalities.

While much of the debate surmised so far has been over whether Bourdieu's social theory is suitable as a framework in which to situate the study's overarching research questions, there has not been much consideration with regard to how to deploy such a model effectively in data collection and analysis. A stumbling block which many researchers encounter when using Bourdieu within a study is the failure to give appropriate recognition to the relational nature of the concepts.

In a paper examining the use of Bourdieu within educational research, Diane Reay (2004) identifies how habitus has, in some cases, been over-privileged. Reay argues that there has been a trend to simply overlay Bourdieu on existing empirical research, rather than give it space within the context of the research to work effectively.

In a paper by James (2015), the author suggests that two possible reasons for such a superficial overlaying of Bourdieu's work; *'(a) the apparent similarity of other concepts with similar names, and (b) important tensions between a Bourdieusian approach and some key characteristics of educational practice, policy and research'* (p.97), are key contributors toward the misuse of the model. While both of these reasons are perhaps understandable, they are also very real 'traps' that a researcher using Bourdieu may

fall into. As such, diligence in devising a methodological approach that both understands and mobilises such a conceptual base appropriately is key.

Within this section, the need for a conceptual tool which captures the intricacies of structure and agency in a neoliberal 21st century Britain has become clear. Through exploration of literature with regard to the use of such tools, it is also clear that many researchers favour a methodology based on a Bourdieusian paradigm within social research in education. However, if a study is to do so successfully it must acknowledge that, as with any conceptual tool, the framework is subject to challenge and debate. That does not mean, however, that it does not hold a great deal of potential in the investigation of how white working-class males' expectations are formed in dialogic engagement with their fields of practice. If used in a careful and considered manner, Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit holds the potential to shine an explanatory light on practices which will be of great import to answering the study's overarching research questions.

2.5.1 Mobilising Bourdieu's capital to conceptualise future decision-making

This research explores how each of the study's core participants accessed, accrued and mobilised social, cultural and economic capital in relational engagement with their class position, geographic location and historic experience to inform their perception of 'what was possible' for their future education and work. As commented by Winterton and Irwin (2012), family educational backgrounds, parental expectations, institutional influences and the influences of friends and peers (p.859), play a substantial role in shaping young peoples' expectations.

In creating a robust theoretical lens in which to address the study's primary research questions, it was important to develop a conceptual framework which not only identified the capitals which were accessed, accrued and mobilised within participants' particular contexts, but also illustrated how their availability and incorporation strengthened or weakened dispositions toward particular educational and career trajectories privileged as 'most legitimate'.

When writing a chapter on the different forms of capital (1986), Bourdieu spoke of capitals' symbolic value *'i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition'* (p.85).

Within a field, Bourdieu argues, forms of capital can remain unrecognised as capital, and instead gain a status of privilege which masks them as 'legitimate competence'.

Within the context of the United Kingdom's system of education, it has been argued by a number of scholars (Spohrer, 2016; Loveday, 2015; Reay, 2013; Reay, David and Ball, 2005), that those forms of capital which are bestowed with most symbolic value, are those associated with a trajectory into middle-class forms of education and work. Within such a context, it has been also been argued that capital traditionally associated with white working-class communities has been positioned as 'flawed' or 'lacking' (Skeggs, Beverley and Loveday, 2012; Skeggs, Bev, 2009). A position which, as discussed earlier, has been evidenced in academic endeavour associated with a perceived 'aspirational deficit' amongst working-class students (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Spohrer, 2011).

In section 1.1, UK policy discourse aligned to an agenda of increasing HE participation, and the positioning of white working-class individuals within such a context, was discussed. To use a phrase coined by Bourdieu, it could be argued that in such a climate an investment in widening access to university has become the *doxic aspiration* or *'a belief which escapes questioning'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.98). An aspiration which holds an unspoken 'common sense' assumption that geographic and social mobility through university participation, and investment in the accumulation of capital aligning with such a trajectory, is bestowed with greatest legitimacy.

2.5.2 Horizons for Action

In recent years there has been notable academic endeavour in the pursuit of a theory of career decision-making which shifts the lens of enquiry away from social mobility, national competitiveness and meritocratic values (Waller *et al.,* 2015), toward a conceptual framework underpinned by equality of opportunity and social justice (Harrison, 2018). In Neil Harrison's 2018 paper, Markus and Nurius' psychological model of possible selves (1986) is mobilised to present a conceptualisation of future decision-making, whilst Caroline Sarojini Hart (2013) attempts to blend the theoretical work of Sen (2001; 1997) and Bourdieu (1986) to develop *'a more dynamic interactive understanding of the conversion factors helping and hindering the development of capabilities'* (p.49).

In both cases, the aforementioned models hold explanatory value in the conceptualisation of how individuals navigate choices related to their future education and work. However, it could be argued that a conceptual model such as 'possible selves' (1986), which has foundational underpinnings in psychology, may not provide enough recognition to the structural conditions in which such intentions are formed. Whilst Harrison recognises the importance of the sociocultural context in which an individual may operate (2018, p.20), the model presented draws comparisons with Archer's (2007b) work on the 'internal conversation'.

Earlier in the chapter, there was a discussion of academic endeavour (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015) which critiqued conceptual models such as Archer's (2010). It was argued through such discussion that models such as the 'internal conversation' ran the risk of privileging individual choice and agency over the structural conditions by which such choices are bound. As such, in order to address the study's overarching research questions, a conceptual model of future decision-making which captured how it is '*bound by social conditions rather than determined by them'* (Dillabough, 2004, p.498) without *'claiming a totalizing agency or an illusory, essentialist notion of freedom'* (Dillabough, 2004, p.498) was required.

To provide space for an examination of the complex, relational negotiation of future educational expectations within the social conditions which, as Dillabough argues, may bind them, this study mobilised a sociological theory of career decision-making developed by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997).

Embedded within the conceptual underpinnings of Pierre Bourdieu, Hodkinson and Sparkes' model offered an opportunity to conceptualise the development of the core participants' expectations in relational engagement with a wider field of social action which is

> *dynamic, complex and made up of interacting and unequal forces. Thus, the employment field in any geographical location entails complex interactions between employers, education providers, local, regional, national and international labour markets and production relations and wider but pervasive influences of social structure (class, gender, ethnicity, age) national and international politics and policies, national and international economic climates, and globalisation (Hodkinson, 2008, p.6)*

In recognising that decisions made by an individual for their future in education and work take place in relational engagement with specific structural conditions operating within a particular geographic location, Hodkinson and Sparkes' model provides room to explore how the pervasive influences of social structure operate within a specific locale. Further to this, such a model provides a recognition that

> *career is always part of unequal and complex relational interactions. Career decision-making is never an exclusively individual act. Within any career field, actions of others, be they employers, managers, admissions tutors, government agents, Trades Unions, colleagues, family and friends have a significant influence. The ability of any individual to progress is strongly influenced by the resources (economic, cultural and social) at their disposal. Any career theory that does not take account of these complex and unequal power relations is inadequate. Any theory, which assumes that only the individual him/herself makes a career decision, is also inadequate. (2008, p.10)*

In other words, the formation of career intentions is never an exercise isolated from the social circumstances in which the development of such expectations take place, and their formation is not an individualised endeavour. Aligning with Bourdieu's relational model, Hodkinson explains that within any social field the actions of others strongly influence the forms of capital which an individual can access, accrue and mobilise in alignment with certain educational and career trajectories. Similar to assertions made by academics in critique of individualised notions of aspiration and meritocratic ideals (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Loveday, 2015; Spohrer, 2011), for Hodkinson any conceptualisation which does not take such relations into account is inadequate:

> *People make career decisions within horizons for action. By horizon for action we mean the arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made. Habitus and the opportunity structures of the labour market both influence horizons for action and are inter-related, for perceptions of what might be available and appropriate affect decisions, and opportunities are simultaneously subjective and objective. (1997, p.34)*

When discussing how an individual conceptualises their future options, Hodkinson and Sparkes coin the concept of *horizons for action.* Essentially, decisions relating to future education and work are made within a set of horizons, which are broadened or limited in engagement with opportunity structures which dictate what may be available and appropriate given the conditions of the field. As such, decisions are pragmatically rational and based upon a dialogic engagement with the structures in which they are situated (1997. p.32). Engaging in a process of decision-making which is influenced by the objective conditions in which the individual resides both enables and restricts the possibilities present within *horizons for action,* and what can be accomplished within them.

In paper by Hodkinson published some eleven years after Hodkinson and Sparkes' first introduction of the theory, Hodkinson draws on the concept of *embedded* and *contingent* choosing coined by Ball *et al.* (2002) to understand the socially contingent nature of future decision-making. For individuals who have easy access to forms of capital which align to HE participation, the choice was *embedded* in that *'they were positioned and had enough relevant social and cultural capital to see the field as a familiar place where they could easily fit in.'* (2008, p.10). Whilst for individuals whose access to capital misaligned with the goal of university participation because *'they were positioned too far from English HE, lacked cultural and social capital, did not understand much about how HE worked, and made very simple choices based on little information and a lack of understanding'* (2008, p.10), the choice was *contingent*.

As discussed in both the introductory section and the review of relevant literature, deindustrialisation and economic change have had a noticeable impact on educational opportunity afforded to white working-class boys. As seen in the work of Willis (1977), Brown (1987) and Ward (2015), such opportunities are intimately linked to the social conditions which dictate their availability. When used in conjunction with Bourdieu's wider conceptual model, *Horizons for action* offers a means by which the socially, geographically and historically contingent nature of future decision-making can be captured. Contingencies which, for this study's participants, dictate formations of 'the possible' for their future in education and work.

2.5.3 Incorporating the social network

Through the discussion of the theoretical contributions of both Bourdieu and Hodkinson above, there is a clear argument for a view that education and employment decision-making is contextual, relational and mediated by the structures in which it operates. In a study focusing on individuals who were non-participants in HE, Fuller, Heath and Johnston argue that such decision-making is also *'embedded and co-constructed within social networks' (2011, p.20).*

The conceptualisation of the social network as a form of capital has been widely mobilised within social research (Putnam, 2001; Bourdieu, 1998b; Coleman, 1988), and a number of studies have highlighted how such networks contribute to the intergenerational transmission of educational (dis)advantage (Ball, Macrae and Maguire, 2013a; Davey, 2009; Reay, David and Ball, 2005) . However Fuller, Heath and Johnston argue that such studies '*rarely focus on more than two generations and even more rarely do they extend beyond the parent-child relationship' (2011, p.18).* Within such a context the authors argue that analysis of the social network not only enriches the temporally contingent nature of such decision-making, but also

> *Situating an individual's decision-making within a nexus of first-hand accounts from those closest to them not only highlights the complexity of the decision-making process, but foregrounds the need to make analytical sense of the tensions and contradictions, and moments of solidarity, which inevitably emerge when exploring social network* (Heath, Fuller and Paton, 2008, p.219)

Whilst Heath, Fuller and Paton mobilised a theoretical framework drawing on the work of Putnam's (2001) strong and weak social ties and work around intergenerational ambivalence (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998), this study operationalises on Bourdieu's conceptual tools within Hodkinson and Sparkes sociological theory of Careership (1997). In such a framework, capital facilitates a means by which to identify the resources mobilised to privilege certain educational trajectories over others within the core participants' *horizons for action.*

Providing space within the theoretical framework to also conceptually engage with data from individuals within the core participants' social networks offers a rich

opportunity to engage with the tensions, contradictions and moments of solidarity inherent in the complex process of educational decision-making.

Hodkinson and Sparkes offer a theory of Careership which is both delicate and relational. When mobilised within a Bourdieusian theoretical framework, it offers a means by which to understand the formation of future expectations as a process working in constant dialogue with the social, geographic and temporal conditions in which they are negotiated. This study uses such a lens to examine how, in the Black Country town of WMV, the study's participants engaged in practices to deploy, access, accrue and mobilise capital in mis/alignment with the *doxic aspiration* of HE participation.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The following section outlines the methodology for the study which took place over a twelve-month period at a secondary school in the Black Country region of the West Midlands. The study employed qualitative research methods such as semi-structured with teaching staff, students from a white working-class background and members of their social networks. Analysis of the qualitative data gathered during the study was conducted using a method of thematic analysis in conjunction with the software package Nvivo in order to address the research questions detailed below:

1. How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?

2. How do white working-class males draw upon the resources available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?

3. How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?

3.1 Ethics

3.1.1 Ethical considerations

In any research discipline, whether it be Education, Particle Physics or Archaeology, it is the responsibility of the researcher to be transparent in their consideration of, and adherence to, a coherent ethical framework through which to conduct their inquiry. In the development of a research design, minimising harm to both the participants and the researcher must be a priority. Whilst the type of harm that may be caused might differ greatly between disciplines, a full reflection from the researcher on the potential of their study to cause harm, and the steps that will be taken to reduce such a risk, are vital.

In the realms of educational research, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) have produced a robust set of ethical guidelines, recommending that

> *at all stages of a project – from planning through conduct to reporting – educational researchers undertake wide consultation to identify relevant ethical issues, including listening to those in the research context/site(s),*

> *stakeholders and sponsors. This means that ethical decision-making becomes an actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation and issues as they arise.* (2018, p.2)

In qualitative social research, the often-participatory nature of study may raise some relatively unique concerns. Whilst any researcher conducting this mode of inquiry would hopefully engage in a rigorous reflection of the ethical dilemmas which may arise, it is highly difficult to account for every issue before a study begins:

> *Students may be attuned to ethical issues in research but still find themselves enmeshed in dilemmas because they had not foreseen how ethical issues may impact upon the participant's privacy, or adequately anticipated the risk of harm arising from the research for participants and for the self (Laine, 2000)*

In the following passage, a reflection of such issues, and the measures that were implemented to reduce the risk of harm, are presented. That is not to say that, through the implementation of these measures, the risk of harm to both the participants and researcher were eradicated, but rather that they formed the foundations of an ethical platform from which the data collection process was conducted.

As an adult researcher working in an environment where there were vulnerable young people present, it was of vital importance that research was conducted in a manner which addressed the impact of my research on participating parties. Parties who, in some instances, could be considered to be in a position of vulnerability.

3.1.2 Steps taken to ensure ethical practice

Within the study, the BERA (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research were mobilised as a foundation on which to develop the ethical framework in which it operated.

As such, the BERA guidelines were used alongside those provided by the host institution (University of Wolverhampton, 2020), to inform the development of the submission to the University of Wolverhampton's ethics committee.

In-keeping with the guidance laid out by BERA (2018, p.2), the guidelines were brought to the attention of the study's participants and they were encouraged to engage with its content. A web link to the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research was also provided to the participants on each of the consent forms used in the study (Appendix 4).

The passage below provides detail of the measures set out by the researcher on issues such as anonymity, the right to withdraw, informed consent, transparency, and privacy and data storage, to safeguard the wellbeing of those involved.

All participants within the research were fully informed of the risks and benefits of involvement in the study and were reminded of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the research at any time. Such information was relayed both in a formal written capacity, and verbally at numerous instances throughout the research process. A detailed plan of the research and its methods was also submitted to the University of Wolverhampton's ethics committee for approval and guidance. At that time, the committee suggested that relevant methodological amendments to the study were made. These were completed and approval was sought prior to the commencement of data collection.

Where a young person participating in the study was under the age of 16, a letter of consent was given to the individual alongside a request that this letter be signed by their parent or guardian. Again, this letter fully detailed the risks and benefits of engaging in the research and no data collection took place until signed consent was received.

Given the that the research was largely located at WMHS, I was in an environment containing numerous individuals who were below the age of 16. As such, a full Disclosure and Barring Service check was undertaken on myself before engaging in any research at the school. The parental consent form also gave parents my contact details should they have any queries which required clarification; or concerns during the process following their giving consent. While undertaking the research in the school, I also maintained an open dialogue with multiple staff members and the SENCO responsible for safeguarding the students participating, to ensure that all parties involved are doing their utmost to promote the physical and psychological wellbeing of those involved.

Due to the potentially sensitive the nature of data being collected through the qualitative methods employed by the study, and the risk of harm arising from participation (BERA, 2018, p.19), maintaining the anonymity of both the participants and the institution in which the research was located, was paramount.

As such, pseudonyms were created for the study's geographic location, 'West Midlands Village', the name of the institution, 'West Midlands High School', and for all individual participants. Alongside this, references to specific people and places which may lead to the institution or participants becoming identifiable, have been removed or amended within the data.

Following the process of anonymisation, all data collected was stored on a password-protected computer which was not accessed by anyone but the principal researcher. In the case that other parties needed to see data, the anonymity of participants was protected.

Upon the study's completion, all electronically stored data will remain on encrypted devices for a period of no longer than five years. Following this period, the data will be destroyed.

During the project, data was stored on a laptop issued by the University of Wolverhampton which was password-protected, encrypted, and linked to an institutional account. A copy of this data was also stored on a password protected USB stick which only the principal researcher had access to.

Whilst the steps illustrated above do not negate the risk of unforeseen harm to either individuals participating in the study or the researcher themselves, it nevertheless provides a basis from which to start. With these measures in place, alongside careful reflection and monitoring throughout the data collection process, it is hoped that any potential risk of harm to individuals and institutions involved has been identified and minimised.

3.2 Positionality

3.2.1 The role of the researcher in qualitative research

When conducting any form of social enquiry, the researcher plays a fundamental role in the study's conception and design. Within studies mobilising a qualitative methodology, the choices made by the researcher, to a greater or lesser degree,

impact upon the research from its outset and maintain an influence until its completion. The development of research questions, the selection of the research site, those who are identified to participate, the questions asked at interview, and how such responses are subsequently analysed and written up, are all based on choices made by the researcher.

If, as illustrated by Bourke (2014, p.2), individuals conducting a piece of qualitative research are themselves the research instruments, it would be only reasonable to expect that an individual's life experience, class position and cultural background would be amongst a number of characteristics bought into a study by each researcher.

The influence of such characteristics holds sway over the process of qualitative research from its inception and are an ever-present companion of the research process through until its eventual completion. As such, a reflexive engagement (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) with issues pertaining to the positionality of a researcher within a study are of particular importance. Indeed, if not engaged with actively, there is a danger that negligence of the subject may have significant methodological and ethical consequences for a piece of qualitative enquiry.

With regard to this study, my own history and experience which, as Schensul and LeCompte (1999, p.71) reflect, will never be *'fully coterminous with the individuals who are members of the community or research setting in question',* has led to certain choices being made in relation to the research design, fieldwork and analysis. In the following passage, a reflection on, and a relationary engagement with, such experience will be conducted.

The research took place in a working-class area of the Black Country, in a school where a number of the young people could be considered vulnerable. Within such a context, paying close attention to the implications of my identity on the dynamic of power within the research process, and identifying imbalances with responsibility and accountability (Skeggs, 2002) was/is a primary ethical concern. Indeed, the implications of a lack of reflexive attention to positionality by a researcher within a study is demonstrated below in an excerpt from a review paper of a monograph by Gillian Evans (2006) entitled *Educational failure and white working class children in Britain:*

> *Instead of a commentary about a shared world, so to speak, what we get is a sort of postmodern romance of the dark night, as plucky Gillian gets down and dirty with the 'common as muck' folks who live and play hard—a sort of Shameless but with subtitles… I do not usually sign up for an identity politics of research (that is, only the white working class' or, more likely, the ex-white working class can research the white working class, etc), but Gillian Evan's look onto the 'others' is figured so often in the persona of an embodied intrusive 'superior' presence that, despite herself (see the introduction to the paperback edition), her account works to further diminish those already disadvantaged (Hey, 2008, p.575)*

Although I considered myself to have a 'good grasp' on the academic considerations relating to positionality and reflexivity before commencing data collection, as a doctoral student my understanding of a reflexive approach to research was based on reading rather than experience. During one of my early site visits to the school, I met with the parents of the young learners involved in the research at a parents' evening which the school had organised before the Autumn term ended in December 2017. Prior to arranging this meeting, I felt confident that, given my own background, I would have a great deal in common with the parents of the young learners and establishing a rapport would be relatively straightforward.

As I sat across the table to the parents of Chris, one of the study's core participants, the realisation dawned on me that whilst my background, largely the town I grew up in and experience of educational disruption, may mean that there were strands of similarity within our lived experience, these were overshadowed by larger elements of difference inherent in the position that I inhabited as a doctoral researcher and a professional working within HE. Up until this moment I had not taken enough time to consider that, whilst my background may have shared commonalities with those of the participants in my younger years, the journey I had subsequently taken through education and work positioned me as different. Indeed, even the fact that I was sitting opposite Chris' parents after they had booked in a slot to see me at a parents evening had connotations for the power dynamic between us, and possible consequences for the research process.

In that moment, reflections relating to my own position as a researcher in the field became more than simply things mentioned in books and journals that I must be mindful of, cementing them as considerations which had real implications for the lived experience and wellbeing of those taking part in the study. Following the meeting, I sat in my car on the school's car park and resolved myself to make the methodological and ethical consequences of my own position within the study a central concern.

Armed with the knowledge that a failure to be reflexive with regard to the impact of my personal social history would be of detriment to the study's credibility, the following passage seeks to address my position within the study and develop an understanding for the reader of the reflexive exercises undertaken during data collection and analysis. However, if as Grenfell asserts (2018), rich reflexivity in research is formed in a relationship between the researcher, researched and the reader, then the following passage is also an invitation to the reader. It is an invitation not to merely consume the presented information, but to reflect on how it may have impacted on the author's methodological choices, presentations of collected data, and representations of the participants involved in the study.

Firstly, I will take time to examine my own social history and explore the impact that my own social, cultural and economic capital held in relation to my approach in the process of research. Secondly, the passage will explore how the similarities and differences between my identity and that of the students, members of their social networks and staff at the school affected the negotiation of an oscillation

> *…between the desire to offer a less hierarchical and more reciprocal, transparent framework and the need to respect the theoretical foundations, methodological discipline, and ethical boundaries of qualitative scholarship (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009, p.285)*

3.2.2 Researcher Background

Having spent my whole life based in or around the West Midlands of England, I was raised in a small town some twenty-five miles north of Birmingham called Burntwood. Using the OfS POLAR 4 dataset as a reference point, the ward of my hometown is currently in the second lowest quintile (2) with rates of young HE participation of 18.8%, and in the lowest possible quintile (1) for adults holding degree-level qualifications. This was very much reflected in my experiences within my own social

networks. Relatively few of my friends went to university at the age of 18. Those that did not follow the university pathway tended instead to enter into the construction and/or service sector, taking up jobs such as builders, electricians and customer service representatives, whilst those that did participate in HE were normally the first in their family to do so.

I grew up in a three-bedroom, semi-detached house on a road next to the local primary school. My parents both came from previous marriages, with my mother giving birth to me at the age of 43. In total I have five siblings, half-brothers and sisters, with the next youngest being some 13 years older than myself. None of my siblings lived with me during childhood, however a few of them often visited at weekends and during the school holidays. The occupations and current geographic location of my siblings vary greatly, with some living less than five miles away from my parents' house and working as receptionists and bar staff, whilst others live near to London, working as computer scientists and physiotherapists.

Perhaps differing slightly to the norm in my town, both of my parents worked in jobs related to care and education, with my mother and father holding the professions of nurse and teacher, respectively. In hindsight as I've grown older, the advantages of access to the more middle-class social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1977) that my parents were able to bring to bear held influence within my own educational experiences. A strong commitment to the importance of education as a tool in which to enrich myself was always displayed by both my mother and my father, and I have a number of childhood memories where I was a less-than-willing participant in family visits to historically significant sites around the country during holidays.

Using the work of Ball, Reay and David (2002) as a reference point, there were clear channels within my familial network in which to draw cultural capital aligned to my eventual progression to university. My father completed an undergraduate degree and was a qualified teacher by the time I was born, and my mother was a qualified nurse. On the face of it, it would appear that given such circumstance, my own participation within HE constituted an *embedded choice*; one in which I had ready access to the relevant capital, in the form of my parents, for university to feature strongly within my own *horizons for action.*

However, due to my father experiencing severe mental health problems and a long battle with addiction, the family's economic stability during my childhood was precarious for long periods of time. After leaving his teaching post on health grounds in my fourth year of primary school, my father worked sporadically in roles such as a customer service representative in a mobile phone shop, and a double-glazing salesman. Due to family circumstances, my mother also cut the hours that she worked in order to provide wider support at home. Upon reflection, it could be argued that during this time my family experienced downward social mobility, with a significant and long-lasting pressure on the family finances. Although rarely vocalised, worry and stress was a constant companion for my family during this period, the effects of which featured within my own experiences of school.

Educationally speaking, my time at school was a mixed bag due in part to struggles with my mental health, which have been a constant companion throughout my time in education and work. For the first five years of my schooling I had what I would describe as a relatively 'normal' experience. There were a number of children who lived in my local area that I spent time with during and after school. I was neither exceptionally bright, nor ever a noticeable underachiever, and I was constantly being castigated by teaching staff at the school for talking too much. However, in my final year of primary school, the effects of the sustained pressure at home resulted in my developing a mental health condition called separation anxiety.

This anxiety morphed quickly into a phobia of any environment that felt in any way unsafe or alien. I couldn't attend parties that my friends threw in places that didn't feel familiar, and my attendance at school was such that I was rarely in the classroom for a full day. This inconsistent engagement in education due to my ill health continued in my first two years of high school, and it was only after a joint effort between my parents, the staff at the school and the local Education Welfare Officer, that several years later, I was able to attend school all day every day.

Unfortunately spending three years with sporadic attendance at school meant that, once I was engaging regularly, I was something of an outsider. The children who were popular, or at least those that were not the subject of bullying, seemed to nestle quite snugly into Willis's (1977) definition of 'lads'. However, at my school the anti-authoritarian subculture was not limited to just white working-class males, and could

quite aptly be attributed to as many female students. Viewing the adoption of similar behaviours to those students, i.e. taking up smoking and getting into fights, as a way to make friends, I began to engage in such activities myself in an effort to ingratiate myself with peers and make friends.

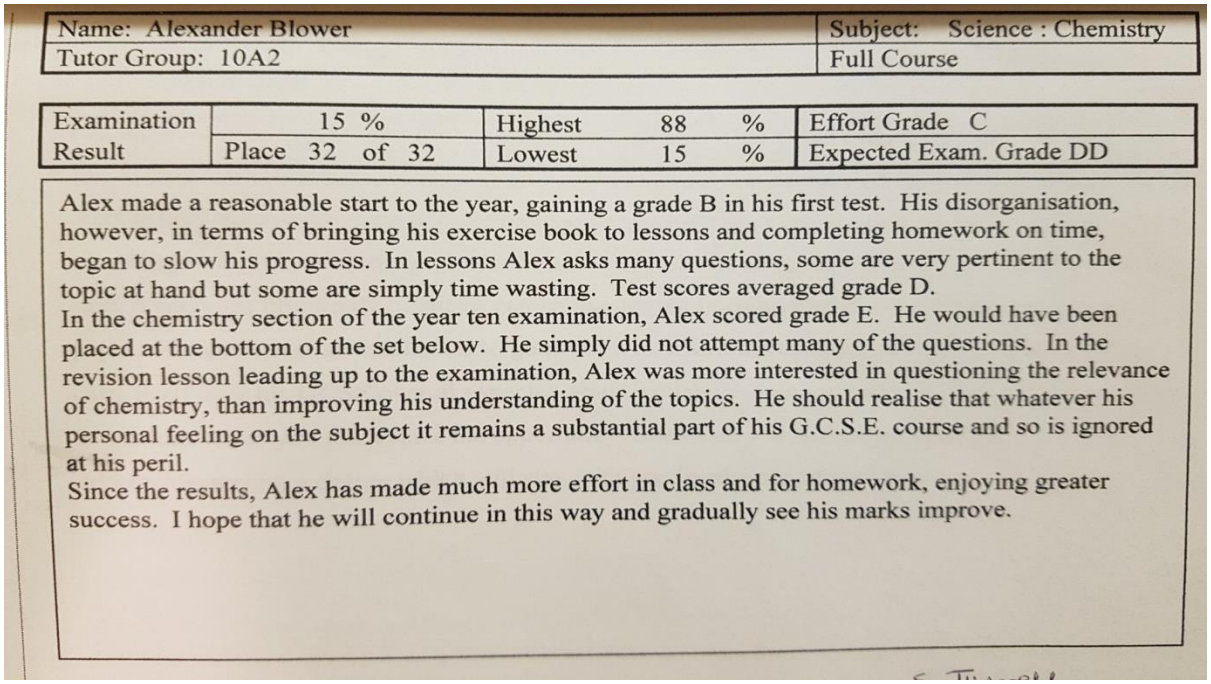
After 18 months of becoming slowly more and more anti-authoritarian and disruptive in an effort to establish myself amongst my peers, I was excluded from the high school in my hometown and relocated to a new institution. In April 2000 I had my first day at a new school located roughly six miles away from Burntwood in a city called Lichfield. In stark contrast to my hometown, according to POLAR data the area of Lichfield in which my new school was located, boasted some of the highest rates of young HE participation in the country.

The new educational environment in which I found myself was decidedly different from any that I had experienced before. Up until this point, all of my schooling had taken place in institutions made up of kids from largely working-class families; a group with which I identified and regularly socialised. However, as the new school was located in a decidedly middle-class area, the class background of individuals at the school mirrored its location. Suddenly I found myself in an environment where it was no longer 'cool' to display anti-authoritarian behaviour, at least not in such an overt manner as that with which I was familiar, and I very quickly felt that I was on the social peripheries once more.

However, it was not just the forms of behaviour deemed to be 'acceptable' which were different. Although subtle in some cases, those ways of speaking, dressing and acting deemed to be most legitimate were misaligned with my previous experiences. Whilst at my first school the uniform consisted of a black jumper and white polo shirt, at my new school I was expected to wear a shirt and tie with a blazer. Such a change had consequences which reached beyond the school gate. I remember vividly covering the distance between the bus stop and my house on my way home from school as quickly as possible, in an effort to minimise the risk of any of my friends from home seeing me in my new uniform. During this period, my time in the arenas of home and school became separate, sometimes conflicting, parts of my life.

From the perspective of educational attainment, this change in environment was probably the best thing that could have happened to me at the time. Whilst I actively

resisted learning in subjects that I didn't like, or more importantly for me at the time, couldn't see the relevance of to my future (fig.3), I became increasingly engaged in subjects which aligned to my curiosity about the world around me, and allowed me to engage in debate.



Name: Alexander Blower				Subject: Science : Chemistry
Tutor Group: 10A2				Full Course
Examination	15 %	Highest	88 %	Effort Grade C
Result	Place 32 of 32	Lowest	15 %	Expected Exam. Grade DD

Alex made a reasonable start to the year, gaining a grade B in his first test. His disorganisation, however, in terms of bringing his exercise book to lessons and completing homework on time, began to slow his progress. In lessons Alex asks many questions, some are very pertinent to the topic at hand but some are simply time wasting. Test scores averaged grade D.
In the chemistry section of the year ten examination, Alex scored grade E. He would have been placed at the bottom of the set below. He simply did not attempt many of the questions. In the revision lesson leading up to the examination, Alex was more interested in questioning the relevance of chemistry, than improving his understanding of the topics. He should realise that whatever his personal feeling on the subject it remains a substantial part of his G.C.S.E. course and so is ignored at his peril.
Since the results, Alex has made much more effort in class and for homework, enjoying greater success. I hope that he will continue in this way and gradually see his marks improve.

Fig.3

Perhaps as a result of my parents' commitment to education and a particular staff member at my new school who took time out to provide me with one-to-one lunch time sessions on topics such as how to structure an essay, I managed to meet the criteria for entry into the school's sixth form. My entry was based on the understanding that I would only study three A-Level subjects, instead of the usual four. Whilst taking this particular pathway positioned me as different to many of my peers who followed a similar trajectory, many of whom were considering application to Russel Group universities, it nevertheless provided me with an opportunity to engage in a curriculum that consisted solely of subjects which I enjoyed.

It was at this point I felt that I truly took ownership over my education as a pathway toward my future goals. During my first two and a half years at the new school, it felt very clear to me that a significant number of the teaching staff viewed me as a 'trouble maker', and it seemed as though I was often treated as the object of a certain level of disdain. Growing tired of this treatment, I was motivated to achieve good A-Level

grades more to prove these individuals wrong than to increase my own chances of HE participation.

Such a change in my attitude was not noted by my teachers, and consequently I was predicted two grade D's and a grade E in my A-Level subjects. The effect of this was to limit the choice I had with regard to universities that I may have wished to progress to. As a result, I applied to institutions with lower entry requirements. Of the five institutions that I made an application to, I received a conditional offer from only two, largely due to my predicted grades. After 'surprising' my teachers and achieving two B's and a C on A-Level results day, I began my study at the University of Wolverhampton in the September of 2007.

Upon graduating from university in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in Drama, I began my professional career; first working for a year as an elected representative in the University's Students' Union, then as a support worker in a hostel for homeless young people. In 2012 I began employment with Birmingham City University as a staff member involved in outreach activity with schools and colleges. Whilst such employment was never something which I held as an ambition during my younger years, it could be argued that my personal experience had a direct impact upon my entry into such employment. Educational outreach and widening access to HE is an area of work which, due to my experiences, I hold an incredibly strong personal commitment toward.

During my time conducting research for this study, I have maintained such employment, working on a part time basis in university outreach for an institution located on the south coast of England and facilitating workshops in collaboration with a number of third sector organisations. My commitment to facilitating equitable access to HE, as can be gleaned from my chosen profession and topic of research, is something for which I am highly passionate, and which plays a significant role in my motivation for conducting the study.

Given time to reflect on my experiences and how they may have formed the lens through which I view the world, my own ways of seeing, acting and being are entwined within my socio-historical experience. Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of this experience is the familiarity through which I inhabit social settings containing members of different class positions. Having spent a relatively equal amount of time

in both working-class and middle-class environs, instead of feeling like 'a fish out of water' in either setting, I view myself as more amphibious. That is not to say that I can swim as well as the fish in water, but rather that I don't experience great stress either in or out of the pond. With this said, perhaps due to childhood experience, I do feel a greater connection with the working-class elements of my background, which is perhaps why I am such a strong advocate for equity of opportunity and social justice.

From the perspective of research design, it would be naive to dismiss the experiences discussed without regard to their impact on this study. As discussed earlier, every piece of qualitative data which is collected will contain the imprint of both the researcher and the participant, whether it is the phrasing of questions at interview, the analysis of data, or the field notes recorded during the data gathering process. As such, rather than in a positivistic manner, striving to eradicate such an imprint, every effort has been made to embrace it within the research design. That is not to say, when discussing the process of data collection, that personal experiences and subjectivity will not be reflexively examined with extreme care, but neither will they lie unacknowledged and hidden. My own personal history, experiences and beliefs have shaped an educational trajectory which has led to the writing of this chapter. As such, a reflexive examination of my position as researcher by both myself and the reader of this study in a transparent and considered manner, is a valuable tool in the rich exploration of the data and the research process.

3.2.3 On the inside, on the outside or somewhere in between?

A common topic of discussion amongst those engaging in qualitative research in differing social settings is locating the researcher's position amongst those participating in the study. The debate surrounding the perception of a researcher as an 'insider' or an 'outsider' is well versed in literature pertaining to qualitative research, culture and education (Gair, 2012; Mercer, 2007; Hammersley, 1993). However, as discussed by Breen (2007), positioning oneself as either insider or outsider within a social setting, in this case a school, would be overly simplistic, and more importantly, somewhat inaccurate.

Due to the variety of participants I was conducting my research with, my position within the research moved *'back and forth across different boundaries'* (Griffith, 1998, p.368) depending on the particularities of the locations and participants with which I was

engaging. Equally, the participants themselves were *'multiple insiders and outsiders'* (Deutsch, 1981, p.174) holding a variety of experiences with feelings about, and attitudes toward, the school.

When such considerations are combined with the temporal nature of the research, noting that changes in the position of a researcher can evolve over time (McKinley, Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000), making absolute claims as to being either an insider or an outsider becomes problematic.

Instead, the intention of the following passage is to explore how access to WMHS was negotiated, reflecting on how choices related to the research methods were made through reflexive engagement with the research spaces and those participating within the study. Through an amalgamation of such considerations, it is the objective of the following text to unearth the multiplicity of positions that were taken in relation to the participants and develop an understanding of their impact upon the research process.

3.2.4 Negotiating access

After the selection of WMHS as an appropriate site for the research (further discussed in section 3.3.1), the next step was gaining access to the site. Through negotiating such access, I hoped to secure buy in from senior staff members with regard to the purpose, length and type of research that I planned to conduct. Having had no previous engagement with the institution, I was slightly anxious about whether the staff at the school would be willing to facilitate participation and devised a strategy to approach the school's Headteacher, Mr Duncan.

Having worked with schools and colleges in the West Midlands region for a number of years as a professional conducting activity designed to widen access to HE; I knew the school was part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). My first step was to secure a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at their head office. During the meeting, I explained the purpose of the research and my intention to conduct the study with one of the institutions within the MAT. The CEO of the MAT was interested in the research and gave me permission to mention that we had spoken in any communication with Headteachers of the MAT schools.

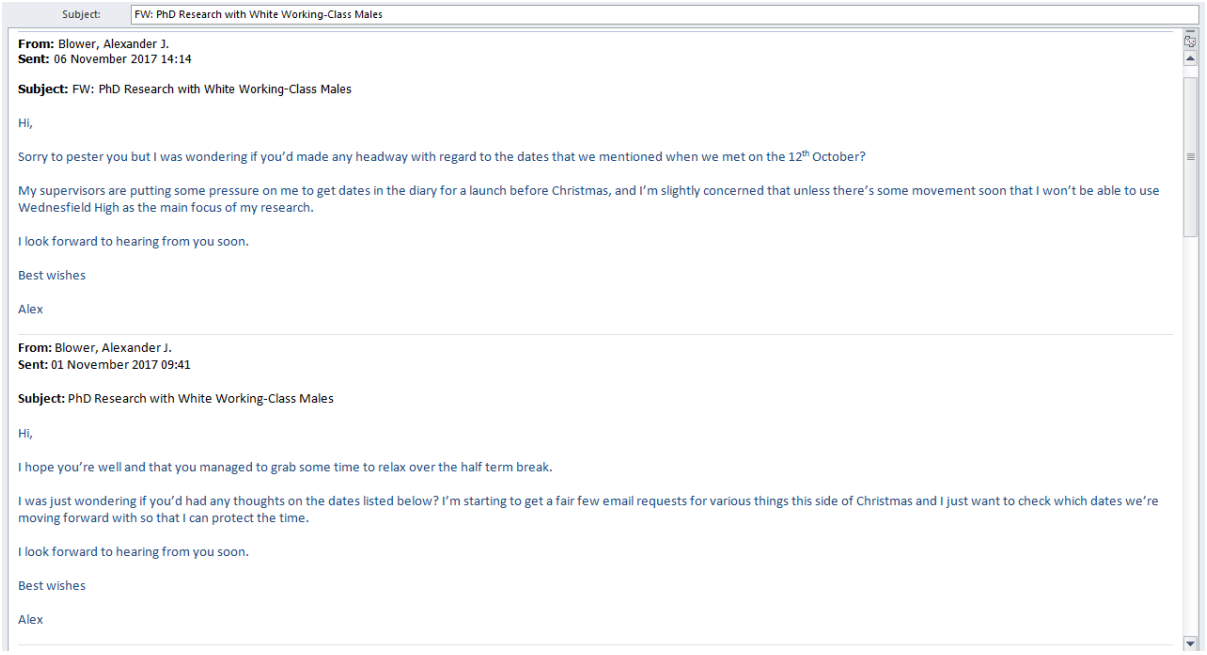
Following the meeting, I sent Mr Duncan an email mentioning that I had spoken to the MAT's CEO and we arranged a meeting for 3rd October 2017. Although I was pleased

to have facilitated an opportunity to engage with Mr Duncan in person, I was slightly concerned that doing so in the way that I had would have implications for the dynamic of the study going forward. I was keen to avoid a situation whereby Mr Duncan felt as though involvement in the study had been mandated by the CEO of the Trust, and planned to make clear that the school's involvement in the research was entirely voluntary.

The initial meeting with Mr Duncan went well and we quickly established common ground within our relationship. Mr Duncan had recently moved to the school after it received an unfavourable judgment by OFSTED and was keen to engage in activity that was designed to develop the canon of knowledge surrounding white working-class males and educational success. He was also from a white working-class background himself, and as such had an interest in the research that was linked to personal experience.

During the meeting, I outlined my intentions with regard to the series of one-to-one sessions with students, interviews with staff at the school, and interviews with members of the students' social networks that I planned to conduct. It was also agreed that aside from the students coming from a white-working class background, defined by eligibility for the pupil premium, and having parents from the local area, any additional criteria for involvement of the year 10 students, and the selection of the students participating in the study, would be conducted by staff at the school.

During our conversation, I asked Mr Duncan if I could present my research and its intentions at a meeting of the leadership team to gain buy in for the study from staff. However, Mr Duncan declined. Instead he passed on my details to Mr Jamerson who at the time was a Physical Education teacher and member of the senior leadership team with a responsibility for safeguarding and student behaviour. After an initial meeting on 12th October 2017 in which we discussed the research, set some actions for identifying students to participate and discussed a launch meeting with the participants, a period of month passed where I didn't receive a reply to emails directed toward Mr Jamerson (Fig 4).



Subject: FW: PhD Research with White Working-Class Males

From: Blower, Alexander J.
Sent: 06 November 2017 14:14

Subject: FW: PhD Research with White Working-Class Males

Hi,

Sorry to pester you but I was wondering if you'd made any headway with regard to the dates that we mentioned when we met on the 12th October?

My supervisors are putting some pressure on me to get dates in the diary for a launch before Christmas, and I'm slightly concerned that unless there's some movement soon that I won't be able to use Wednesfield High as the main focus of my research.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes

Alex

From: Blower, Alexander J.
Sent: 01 November 2017 09:41

Subject: PhD Research with White Working-Class Males

Hi,

I hope you're well and that you managed to grab some time to relax over the half term break.

I was just wondering if you'd had any thoughts on the dates listed below? I'm starting to get a fair few email requests for various things this side of Christmas and I just want to check which dates we're moving forward with so that I can protect the time.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes

Alex

Fig 4.

Whilst my anxiety levels grew with regard to being able to follow through on the research after the initial meetings, I also realised that the school was under significant pressure at the time. As a researcher conducting a study in which the support and participation of the staff was entirely voluntary, I reasoned that it was perhaps inevitable that regular communication with regard to the research would be low on the list of priorities for some staff.

On 15th November 2017 I received an email from Mr Jamerson identifying his colleague, Mr D, as my main point of contact for moving forward with the research, and asking for Mr D to arrange a launch meeting with the participating students for Tuesday 5th December. It was also agreed in the email that on the evening of Thursday 14th December I would attend a parents evening at the school to meet the students' parents to explain the purpose of the study, and ask if they would be willing to be involved and sign relevant consent forms.

Following the shift in responsibility for liaising with myself from Mr Jamerson to Mr D, communication became much more regular, and I protected some time to talk with Mr D prior to my meeting the students who had been selected for participation in the research by the school on 5th December.

During my first meeting with Mr D I found out a little more about Mr D's background:

> *Mr D, who is a PE teacher at the school, spoke a little about his background. Originally from the local area, Mr D had attended the school himself as a student. He had a soft Black Country accent and stated that he had started working at the school as an NQT 8 years ago. Prior to starting work at the school Mr D did his teacher training with a local Higher Education provider, and although his parents live around the corner from the school, he lives in a town approximately 8 miles away [field notes]*

As somebody who was himself from a white working-class background and still had familial ties to WMV, the experiences of Mr D sparked an interest with me as he was somebody that may have had similar experiences, but was in a very different stage within his career in work and education to that of the students involved in the study. His ties to the local area also contributed to his commitment as a teaching professional to providing opportunities for the students at the school.

This marked the first in series of encounters with Mr D, some taking the form of discussions about the logistics of the data collection in person and by email, whilst others explored the possibility of Mr D deepening his level of involvement with the study as a core participant.

3.2.5 Staff

Aside from Mr D deepening his level of involvement with the study and consenting to my approaching his family members to take part in semi-structured interviews, Mr D also brokered a series of interactions between myself and his teaching colleagues, providing the names, job titles and email addresses of staff members with which I could then initiate contact. As I had no opportunity for an introduction to staff members that I wished to engage with through more formal mechanisms, the support of Mr D in this regard was invaluable.

Although, after completing the relevant safeguarding checks, I was given the freedom to walk the school corridors, there were many areas of the institution which were inaccessible due to my not having a staff identification badge to pass through the digitised internal security doors. Essentially this meant that whilst in principle I was free to explore the institution and introduce myself to a variety of staff members, in actuality my mobility was restricted to a small section of the school which housed the Physical Education, Music and Drama departments. With regard to my interactions

with staff members, this limited the breadth of my face-to-face engagements with them significantly, and many of the observations made in my field notes were based on interactions with the Physical Education, Music and Drama teachers.

As such, instead of creating 'chance' encounters in person, approaches made to teachers requesting their involvement in the study were largely made by email. Taking such an approach had varying levels of success, with some staff members such as Mrs Jenkins, the behavioural lead for the lower half of the school, and Mrs Pol, the school careers advisor, replying immediately, and others not responding at all.

Once interviews with staff members were arranged, there were still occasional challenges regarding their completion in the fast-paced, sometimes unpredictable environment of the school. All of the interviews with staff members were conducted during the school day. Often this meant that, in order for the interview to be conducted successfully, it needed to fit around the staffs' busy timetables:

> *I have just returned home after another missed meeting with Miss Adams for interview. This is the third Monday in a row that I have gone across to the school to conduct the interview only for it to either be cancelled last minute, or told on arrival that Miss Adams was otherwise engaged. Whilst I am perhaps understandably a little frustrated, I also know that in each instance Miss Adams had very little control over the situation. The nature of working in such an environment of course means that things will happen unexpectedly, and they will likely take precedence over a semi-structured interview with myself. [field notes]*

Instances such as the example cited above were a regular occurrence during research in the field with the staff, and throughout the data collection period I regularly made the drive across to the school only find out that due to unforeseen circumstances, the planned interview could no longer go ahead.

Apart from the challenges listed above regarding the practical considerations of gathering the data required for the research, it also gave rise to a number of reflections on my relative position within the school in relation to the staff. Although I was provided with the relevant paperwork and permission to access all areas of the school as a staff member would, the fact that I was not a staff member meant that I did not have the appropriate artefacts to move as freely as they could. On a number of occasions I had

to enlist the help of a passing colleague in order to get through the door which led to the school's reception, and I should imagine that through their eyes I would have been perceived as a visitor to the space rather than someone who belonged within it.

Although, as detailed below, I received snatches of information about things like staff absences, or issues pertaining to behaviour or safeguarding amongst the students during my time at the school, I was rarely in a position to receive the information at the same time as the teaching staff, meaning that each time I entered the institution I was comparatively 'out of the loop' with regard to recent developments:

> *Apparently over the last two weeks there has been a large number of staff absences. Last Monday alone there were 14 staff absent which resulted in the entire senior leadership team having to cover a day's teaching [field notes]*

However, the fact that I was party to such information itself suggests that I was not seen by all teachers as an outside entity, but rather I occupied a space in between, a peripheral space in which I regularly had elements of shared knowledge and experience, but never a complete understanding.

3.2.6 Students

I first met the group of students who had been selected by the school for participation in the study on 5th December 2017. After accompanying Mr D to a small meeting room near to the school's reception area, he left to collect the students from their respective lessons and bring them to the room in order for me to provide information about the study and ask if they would like to be involved:

> *In the five minutes that followed whilst I was waiting for the students to arrive with Mr D, I started to get a little anxious. This surprised me as up until this point, perhaps due to the nature of work in education, I had felt very comfortable in the school environment. However, during this five minutes I became very conscious of the clothes that I was wearing (a jumper, a pair of dark jeans and some trainers) and even the way that I was sitting. In order to try and allay this feeling by the time the students appeared, I busied myself with arranging the letters I had written for their parents, and reflected*

on the suitability of the room as a place in which to first meet the students [field notes]

This meeting marked the first time in which I had consciously reflected on how I would physically appear to the students during our meeting. By my choice of trainers and jeans I may well have made a subconscious decision that this was appropriate attire given the context of the encounter, but actively reflecting on such choices gave rise to possible considerations to the perception of my position in the research setting by the young males. In subsequent sessions with the students I wore similar attire, reflecting that non-conformity to the staff dress code provided an avenue in which to avoid the perception of myself as closely aligned to the teaching staff by the young participants.

When the students arrived in the meeting room, they appeared a little confused. Mr D later told me that the students had not received any information about their selection prior to the meeting, and that this was the first time that they were aware of their possible involvement.

Such an encounter provided another opportunity for reflection. I considered what it was that I was asking the students to participate in, how the information regarding the study had been communicated, and what the students may have felt the possible implications for involvement were amongst their peers. During the meeting with the students' parents a week later, I discussed a number of points arising from such reflection, providing reassurances that I was aware of, and actively engaged with considerations about the participants' wellbeing. As the young participants were under the age of 16, it was also at this stage that parental permission for involvement in the study was obtained.

A large portion of the time that I spent with Chris and Vince, two young white working-class males at the school, took the form of weekly one-to-sessions lasting approximately an hour each. Although the aim of these sessions for the study was to build rapport with the participants and gain contextual information to inform the semi-structured interviews which were planned to follow, I was keen that Chris and Vince found the time we spent together useful and productive. As such, during the initial meeting, I ran an activity with each student which aimed to reflect on what they would like their life to look like in 10 years' time. Using this discussion as a base to work from, we then talked about the possible skills or knowledge that it would be useful if they

developed to achieve their goals, and built a plan for the sessions based around the areas that were discussed.

Co-constructing the content for the sessions provided a plan for engagement with each of the participants that was built around their interests and possible plans for the future. Whilst it provided guidelines for the sessions, I was also keen to ensure that producing such a plan would not place me into a dynamic with the students whereby I was seen as creating work for them, or aligning myself too closely in my behaviour to that of the teachers.

As such, I attempted to maintain a level of informality within sessions, dressing in jeans, trainers and a jumper, accepting that at times swearing would be used within the context of the conversation being held, acknowledging that the sessions would often deviate from the activities that were planned, and that there was no expectation for the students to produce 'work'. As a result, sessions with the students quite often strayed from the planned content. However, such deviations provided a rich vehicle in which to build rapport, and it was often during such divergences that students became more actively engaged in voicing their thoughts and feelings.

As touched upon in sections 3.4.1.1 and 3.4.1.2, I was also aware that the model of engagement with Chris and Vince provided them with a means, through the regular meetings, by which to access forms of social and cultural capital that may have otherwise been absent. Whilst I was keen to draw on my experiences in support of the students' objectives where possible, I was also acutely aware that my own experience risked an inadvertent presentation of certain educational trajectories as more 'desirable' than others.

During the sessions I made every effort to balance impartiality, with my desire to be a useful resource for the students. However, as can be seen in the reflection on my efforts to support Chris with obtaining work experience (section 3.4.1.1), at times my own position as a middle-class researcher led to mistakes being made. Mistakes which foundations were based on assumption formed from my own access to capital and unconscious dispositions. Following such instances, I was as proactive as possible in conducting a reflexive engagement with my own position in the research relationship. I made every effort to safeguard against the risk of such instances occurring, however

I was also acutely aware that, due to my own privileged position, I could not mitigate the risk in its entirety.

Towards the end of the 12-week period of one-to-one sessions with the young participants, I raised the subject of the semi-structured interview which I planned to conduct with them in the next session. I realised at the time that asking the students to participate in a recorded interview was very different to the way in which our sessions had been framed so far, and the idea of speaking to me while a dictaphone was recording may be uncomfortable. So, in order to build familiarity with the recording device and the procedure that the semi-structured interview would follow, I asked the students to conduct a semi-structured interview with me for the following week. I agreed with each of the students that in such an interview they could ask me, as long as there was no contravention of the school's policies, whatever they wished:

> *Vince asked a total of ten questions covering a range of different topics. Questions included my views on education, global politics and my own passions and interests. Vince also asked me who I go to for advice and guidance if I need it. Being interviewed by Vince was interesting in unexpected ways. Although I can't remember which questions were most surprising, I will listen back to the interview later and reflect [field notes]*

Providing Chris and Vince with the opportunity to interview me, facilitated a mechanism by which I could work to redress the dynamic of power within the interview setting. It also had an unexpected and much welcomed outcome of allowing me to reflect on each of the participants' interests and priorities based on the questions they decided to ask.

3.2.7 The Social Network

As outlined in discussions around the incorporation of the social network in section 2.5.3, engagement with members of the core participants' social networks provided an opportunity to explore the intergenerational nature of the formation of future educational expectations.

Following a methodological approach which is further discussed in section 3.7.2, contact with identified members of each of the core participants' social networks was brokered through conversations with the participants about the best approach to take.

As such, the initiation of communication was conducted through a variety of different methods. In the case of Mr D, he spoke to his mother, father and wife, arranging dates, times and a suitable location for me to interview each of them. In the case of Chris and Vince, after securing their permission I contacted their mothers, who had each been identified as a key source of advice and guidance, directly by telephone. Through such conversations, I was able to arrange interviews with the mothers of Chris and Vince, securing the contact details of other members of the social network whom the students had identified.

In Chris' case the other identified source of advice and guidance, his grandmother, lived with them in the family home and was available to be interviewed at the same time as his mother. However, initiating contact and negotiating involvement with Vince's cousins, Mark and Pauline, involved ringing a telephone number supplied by Vince's mother; having a long conversation with them about who I was and the intentions of the research. Following this conversation, I was invited down to a community centre in WMV where Mark and Pauline spent a lot of time in their role as community representatives, to conduct a single group interview with both of them at the same time.

Aside from Mark and Pauline, the interviews with members of Chris', Vince's and Mr D's social networks largely took place at their homes. For the interview with Chris' mother and grandmother I made the trip across to their house, which was a short walk from WMHS, during a weekday afternoon while Chris was at school. The interview itself took place in their front room and, similar to Mark and Pauline, involved both Chris' mother and his grandmother at the same time.

Whilst ideally it would have been preferable to interview each of the participants individually, I was very aware that as a relative stranger entering their homes, there was potential for my visit to cause discomfort. As such, I made the decision to ask the participants which format of interview they would feel most comfortable with. For Mr D's parents, Chris' mother and grandmother, and Mark and Pauline, the preferred option was that they were interviewed together.

Conducting interviews with members of the participants' social networks provided an opportunity for me to gather data from locations which were separate to the school. Going into the homes of Vince, Chris and Mr D provided an opportunity to develop an

insight into their lives outside of the school environment and gather more detailed information about their circumstances.

However, trusting me with access to their homes and social networks also carried with it an increased sense of responsibility in my moral and ethical obligations to the students and their family members. During my conversations with Chris, Vince and Mr D about approaching members of their network, I made it clear that I would not be asking questions specifically related to them. Rather I would be using the interviews to talk to their family members about their own experience of schooling and how they felt it prepared them for work.

At times during the interview it was unavoidable that the members of the social networks being interviewed spoke about the core participants. However, this was often by way of comparison to their own experiences in work and school, rather than as a means to scrutinise the individuals who held a central role within the study.

During my time interviewing members of Vince, Chris and Mr D's social networks, shifts in my position relative to the participants were frequent. In the eyes of Vince and Chris' mothers it is possible that I was perceived as closely aligned to the school, stemming from my previous encounter with them before the data collection commenced at a school parents evening. For Mark and Pauline, many of the questions that they asked prior to the interview beginning, were about the university which funded my research and its role within the local region. Whilst for Mr D's parents, I was a young man roughly the same age as their son who was studying at university and had asked to speak to them.

3.2.8 Summary

Throughout this passage, I have considered the possible implications for a lack of reflexive awareness on behalf of the researcher for data collected and presented in qualitative research. I have provided information on my background and educational history, as well as my experiences of initiating and conducting the research with individuals from WMHS. It is my intention that, through the provision of such information, the section develops the understanding of the reader in relation to what I 'bring in' to the research, and how it influenced decisions made throughout the research process.

Using such understanding as a tool by which to engage with the assertions made within this thesis, it was the intention of this section to provide the reader with a means to reflexively engage with how, why and when certain decisions with regard to the research were made in relation to its location and the participants involved.

3.3 Qualitative case study approach

Through examination of prior scholarly research, it is apparent that the negotiation of white working-class students' educational expectations is both complex and embedded within the structural conditions in which they reside (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015). As such, the selection of a methodological framework which captured the nuance and complexity inherent within the educational and career decision-making process of the participants, was integral in addressing the research's guiding questions. As the research sought to explore how white working-class students negotiated their future expectations for education and work in a relational manner with both their educational, social and geographic location, the choice was made to take the approach of a qualitative case study.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, explanations pertaining to the disparity in rates of educational success for white working-class students within academic research, are underpinned by a complex interweaving of elements such as geographic location, social memory, and the harmful effects of experiences of inequality. However, Chapter 1 also contended that to date, much of the work conducted to provide an explanation for the disparity in rates of HE participation for white working-class students has been geared toward an illustration of the 'problem' through the interrogation of large data sets (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019). Or, when describing possible explanatory factors within policy discourse, the discussion has been built on a foundation of assumption, homogenising the group through a reliance on the notion of a perceived 'aspirational defecit' (Hillman and Robinson, 2016).

As such, to address the studies over-arching research questions and move beyond overly simplistic explanations such as those detailed above, the methodological device employed by the study focused on facilitating a depth of understanding. As discussed by Stake (1995), when exploring issues relating to the formation of future expectations, it is apparent that they are not clean and simple but, as Chapter 2 highlights, intricately wired to social, historical and personal contexts.

Discussion of the work of Willis (1988, 1977), and interrogation of data provided by the Black Country Consortium's Economic Intelligence Unit (2019), highlight the historically and geographically situated nature of inequality embedded within the research's chosen location. Work by academics such as Hodkinson (2008) have highlighted the complex, relational manner in which such inequalities interact with an individual agent in their formation of 'what's possible' for their future. As such, for the study to meet its stated aims, methods which provided space to develop a deep understanding of such contexts was necessary. Clearly defining the focus of the research to a single educational institution in the Black Country, allowed for a detailed exploration to be conducted of how, within their unique historic, geographic and socio-economic contexts, the participants *horizons for action* were formed.

Taking the approach of a qualitative case study allowed room to interrogate the complexities of lived experience. The ability to capture and reflect upon such nuances was instrumental to the study, engendering a mechanism whereby the study's core research questions could be addressed.

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), suggest that such an approach to qualitative research usually involves the following four features:

- *Strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test a hypothesis*
- *Tendency to work with unstructured data. i.e. data not coded into a closed set of analytic categories at the point of data collection*
- *Investigation of a small number of cases*
- *Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretations of the meanings and function of human actions. Quantification and statistical analysis plays a subordinate role at most (p.28)*

Selecting the cases of a small number of core participants who had a relationship with WMHS facilitated a defined focus to the research in which I could explore the nature of the phenomena. Through such an approach, my efforts to collect data as a lone researcher were not spread across numerous sites. This allowed time to become familiar with the research location and build a rapport with those whom I engaged.

As Yin describes in a text on the mobilisation of the case study as a methodological tool (2013), the appropriate 'bounding' of the case within a real, specific context is integral to its justification as a research instrument:

> *The case cannot simply be an abstraction, such as a claim, an argument or even a hypothesis. These abstractions could rightly serve as the starting points for research studies using other kinds of methods and not just case study. To justify doing case study research, you need to go one step further. You need to define a specific real life "case" to be a concrete manifestation of the abstraction* (p.33)

In the context of this particular study, the case was a single school involving a select number of core individuals who had both a historic and current relationship with the institution. Bounding the research within a specific, real life, location provided a tangible site in which I could immerse myself and focus my efforts on developing a deep understanding of the educational and social context in which the participants operated. Within the section of this thesis detailing the research context, quantitative data demonstrated the current and historical disparity in access to HE for white working-class males, and the impact that rapid economic and social change had opportunities for employment within the locality. Taking a case study approach embedded within a robust conceptual framework, afforded the opportunity to explore the how's and why's in relation to the issue; providing a means to explore how the participants' future expectations were formed in relational engagement with their unique social and geographic context.

In light of the decision to take a case study approach, I sought to construct a methodological framework which allowed the opportunity to

> *…investigate some aspect of the lives of people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves.* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

As Rubin and Rubin discuss in their text on qualitative interviewing (2011), a positivist approach to research design can play down the importance of cultural distinctions in its search for rules which apply to all people all of the time (p.32). In the context of this study it was these cultural distinctions, the way individuals viewed the situations they

faced, how they regarded one another, and how they formed future orientations in relation with these experiences, which a qualitative case study approach to research design provided me with the tools to explore.

As described by Stake, the real business of case study research, and indeed this particular research endeavour, is to *'take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does'* (Stake, 1995, p.8). Within the context of this study, it was not the primary aim of the guiding research questions to compare and contrast the experiences of the core participants with other groups who are underrepresented within HE. Rather it was to gain a deep understanding of the social, cultural and economic resources which were accessed, accrued and mobilised to shape the *horizons for action* of the participants.

3.3.1 Selecting WMHS as the research location

The rationale behind the selection of WMHS as the research location was predicated on two main reasons. Firstly, as discussed within the section detailing the socio-economic context of the area, WMHS was located in a community which, since the de-industrialisation of the late twentieth century, had faced significant economic challenges. For the residents of WMV, such a shift had resulted in significantly fewer opportunities for employment amongst its predominately white working-class population, and the community faced significant challenges relating to work, education and wellbeing as a result. The economic and educational challenges faced by both the locality and the school, highlighted by data from the Black Country Intelligence Unit (Black Country Consortium, 2019) and the OfS, were highlighted in Chapter 1.

Ensuring that the selection of a location was based in evidence that demonstrated its appropriacy was of great importance to the success of the study. However, it was also tempered by a degree of pragmatism regarding the level of access I would need to secure in order to conduct the data collection in an effective manner. As I had a pre-existing relationship with a senior member of staff at the Multi Academy Trust which had oversight for WMHS, I had a means by which to initiate access and begin to build a research relationship.

3.4 Participants

This section introduces the study's participants, providing a rationale for their selection in relation to the overriding questions on which the research is founded.

Within the study, participants were approached through a mechanism of purposeful sampling (Patton 2002; 1990). In alignment with the rationale provided for this study's qualitative case study approach (Stake, 1995), purposeful sampling afforded the opportunity to select

> *information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations* (Patton, 2002, p.30)

In alignment with Patton's assertion, the intention of the research was not to create empirical generalizations, but rather to gain a deep understanding of how participants mobilised available social and cultural resources in relational engagement with their social, historical and geographic location to form future educational expectations. In light of such intentions, employing an approach of purposeful sampling provided a means by which to deeply engage with the selected, information-rich cases.

As described by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), the process of purposeful sampling involves the identification of selection of participants who have knowledge and experience surrounding the purpose of enquiry. As such, data collection with the study's core participants and members of their social networks was conducted for two reasons. First, it provided a method to explore the intricate process by which the participants drew on the resources available to them. Such resources dictated the breadth of their *horizons for action*, influencing the future education and work which could pragmatically be deemed 'possible' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1996). Secondly, through engagement with members of the core participants' social networks, it also facilitated a means by which to explore how such negotiations were shaped and influenced by the historical experiences of those closest to them (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011).

The second part of the section discusses the rationale for conducting data collection with seven individuals who were staff members at WMHS. The interviews sought to provide an insight into how, within the specific socio-historical conditions of the school and its locality, the institution deployed practices to develop the expectations of the white working-class students for their future in education and work.

3.4.1 Core participants and members of their social network

Core Participants	**Data Collection Methods**	**Social Network Group Interviewed**
Chris *When the data collection began Chris was fifteen years old and in year 10 at WMHS. Lives with his mother, father and grandmother in WMV approximately a ten-minute walk from WMHS.*	**Rapport Building Phase** **2 Interviews**	**Judy** *Chris' mother and a full-time carer for Margret. Judy attended WMHS as a student. Judy lives in WMV, approximately a ten-minute walk from WMHS.* **Margret** *Chris' grandmother who lives with them in the family home.*
Vince *When data collection began Vince was fifteen years old and in year 10 at WMHS. Lives with his mother in WMV approximately a five-minute walk from WMHS.*	**Rapport Building Phase** **2 Interviews**	**Sarah** *Vince's mother. Sarah lives with Vince in WMV, approximately a five-minute walk from WMHS. Sarah attended WMHS herself as a student and works as a member of the cleaning staff at a local hospital.* **Mark and Pauline**

		Vince's cousins Mark and Pauline live in WMV and are both active within the local community. They have regular contact with Vince and often involve him in their work within the local community.
Mr D *Current staff member and ex-student. Mr D attended a local institution of Higher Education before qualifying as a Newly Qualified Teacher and returning to the school as an educator.*	**Rapport Building Phase** **1 Interview**	**Tom** *Mr D's father. Lives with Karen in WMV approximately a fifteen-minute walk from WMHS. Prior to his retirement Tom spent most of his career as a machine engineer before moving into property maintenance prior to his retirement.* **Karen** *Mr D's mother. Lives with Tom in WMV approximately a fifteen-minute walk from WMHS. Following a career break in which Karen cared for their children, she returned to work as the catering manager of a local school.* **Mr Jamerson** *Staff member at WMHS. Mr Jamerson provided advice to Mr D whilst he was a student at the institution. At the time*

		of data collection Mr Jamerson was still a member of staff at the institution.

Table 2: Core participants and members of their social network

Following a meeting with the Headteacher of WMHS, Vince and Chris were identified by the school as students who were suitable to take part in the study. Both Chris and Vince were of a white working-class background, which was identified by their eligibility for Pupil Premium funding, and had historic familial connections to both the school and WMV. Both students were what could be described as 'middling' in regard to their attainment, with neither being predicted to achieve top marks in their GCSE examinations, but for both continuing on to study A-Levels at the school's Sixth Form could have been viewed as a feasible option given their predicted attainment.

Interestingly, the selection of students who were, as Brown (1987) would term it 'ordinary', also provided an opportunity to conduct the research with students who inhabited an educational middle ground. A middle ground which, as argued in the literature review by Brown and Roberts (2012), is sometimes overlooked.

3.4.1.1 Chris

At the time I began my engagement with Chris he was in his fourth year as a student at WMHS. Chris was a keen gamer. During nearly all of the one-to-one sessions which were conducted with Chris, he made time to speak enthusiastically about a variety of titles he was playing on his game console, and mentioned on numerous occasions that this was his main hobby. Chris lives a short distance from the school with his mother, father and grandmother. Both of Chris' parents also attended the school, with his father leaving at the age of 16, and his mother slightly later after completing a level 3 National Vocational Qualification in Business. Chris' mother has a small business selling homemade craftwork which she made time for alongside her full-time commitments as a carer for Chris' grandmother. Chris' father is currently employed as a carpet fitter.

With regard to his subjects of study, Chris particularly enjoyed subjects relating to science, maths and media. He spoke in great detail in one of the early one-to-one sessions about a current project that they were working on in Engineering to design

and produce a wheel for a racing car. In the early sessions, Chris spoke of his aspirations to be either a computer games tester, or a sniper in the army in the future. Whilst Chris' aspirations with regard to a future career were high, he didn't possess a great deal of knowledge with regard to what would be required to achieve them. In a later session, Chris raised the subject of joining the armed forces again, saying his mother mentioned that it would be difficult for him to get into the army due to his asthma.

Chris' experience as a student at WMHS has been difficult. During his early years at the institution, Chris disclosed that he was bullied on a regular basis, and although he said it is better now, he described his time so far at school as 'hellish'. In several of the sessions, Chris spoke of his parents' wish for him to get an apprenticeship after finishing his GCSEs. Chris was not keen on the idea of continuing on in education at the school after he completed his GCSEs, and undertaking employment-based learning was the pathway that both of his parents followed after they completed their studies. Chris' predicted grades were such that all post-16 educational routes would be open to him, however at the time of data collection, he saw an apprenticeship as the most likely option.

For Chris' year 10 work experience, he was told by one of his teachers about the possibility of a placement with a local company specialising in computer gaming. However, after talking the opportunity through with his mother, it was deemed that the 15 miles of travel to and from the head office each day would not be achievable.

In one session, Chris and I talked about the availability of courses at local colleges. Chris has a cousin who went to college and had left before completing his course. He had told Chris that the lecturers weren't very good and, due to that, Chris hadn't begun to explore it as an option. After accessing the website of a local college in a session, Chris reflected on what was available. Whilst there were many courses that he was interested in, he appeared to be concerned about being able to afford to travel on the bus regularly to college due to the price of fares. Chris wasn't aware that many colleges offered a free bus service to students, so Chris was intending to limit his search to only the most local institutions.

3.4.1.2 Vince

Vince has a passion for politics. His cousins, Mark and Pauline, are both politically engaged, and he spent a lot of his free time supporting them with campaigning on local issues. For Vince's year 10 work experience he was able to secure a week-long placement in the office of a local MP. Vince lives with his mother in a house located a short walk away from WMHS. Following a period of time where his mother, Sarah, did not work due to illness, she began working in a support role at one of the hospitals in the local area during the time in which data was collected. In one of the early sessions with Vince, he mentioned that his father wasn't around anymore, however I could see that the line of conversation was causing discomfort, so I did not pursue it in any further detail.

Vince regularly conducts activity outside of school which is facilitated through the position of his cousins, Mark and Pauline, within the local community. He was also very aware of his family's historic connection with the local area and mentioned in one of the sessions that his grandfather had worked on the construction site building the first iteration of the school, and that he had presented some old photos of the area at a local history group. I enquired during this session as to whether Vince got nervous doing the presentation, but he said it was fine because he was only presenting to old people. Vince is also very inquisitive. Over the course of the one-to-one sessions he asked me questions about HE funding for students, the difference between studying BTEC and A-Level qualifications, my thoughts on whether young people should be allowed to vote at the age of 16, and how university degrees were structured.

Vince was also very interested in what was involved with doctoral research, and the qualifications that people gained that would lead to embarking on PhD study. Although Vince mentioned in one of the sessions that he had taken an opportunity to attend a careers' fair in a nearby city through school, Vince's knowledge with regard to HE progression routes was limited.

However, during the one-to-one sessions, I found that Vince used me as a resource in many of the sessions to develop his knowledge of HE through drawing on my experience. In other words, for Vince, I became a member of his network from which he could draw 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998) about the educational credentials which may be needed to achieve his goals. In one of the latter sessions

following his week-long work experience placement, Vince was exploring the civil service as a possible career pathway, so he showed me the recruitment website for MI6; quizzing me on the details regarding required qualification types suitable for a career as an intelligence officer. Following Vince's work experience, he also joined Labour Youth and increased his volunteering activity with his cousin.

With regard to his views on the school, in the early weeks Vince spoke quite negatively about his experiences, providing examples such as fire alarms being set off on multiple occasions throughout the school day, the attitude of some of the teachers at the school, and the lack of a regular teacher in some subject areas such as maths, as reasons to justify his opinions. In a session a few weeks later I questioned Vince further on his perception of the school and he provided more positive answers, stating that a lot had changed since the new Headteacher arrived and that it was better than it was. From data recorded in my field notes with regard to the school, I was aware that the school was struggling significantly with staff absences during the period that Vince voiced his more negative opinions. In one of our early sessions Vince said that he would like to continue in education, but definitely not at the school. However, in one of the last sessions, his opinion had shifted slightly, stating that he liked the idea of the Sixth Form because he wasn't sure that a more independent learning experience at college would be right for him.

3.4.1.3 Mr D

As a current teacher at WMHS, Mr D was at a markedly different stage in his journey with regard to education and work than the study's two other core participants, both of whom were in year 10 when the data was collected. Now in his mid-thirties, Mr D attended WMH as a student before progressing to a local university and eventually returning to the school as a newly qualified teacher. When considering the study's guiding research questions, the involvement of Mr D provided the opportunity to examine the formation of his future career and educational expectations from a different temporal standpoint to that offered by Chris and Vince. It could be argued that Mr D's entry into teaching, a profession, which could be considered middle-class, constituted a 'successful' transition into a middle-class job from a working-class background. As such, his involvement provided an opportunity to reflect on his

experiences, and examine the forms of social, cultural and economic capital which were made available to facilitate his upwardly mobile trajectory.

During my initial site visits to the school, Mr D was designated as my primary contact by the Headteacher, and over the following weeks we developed a strong rapport. After Mr D disclosed that he was from the local area, went to the school himself, and was from a working-class background, I asked if he would be willing to have a deeper level of involvement in the research as a core participant, to which he agreed.

Given Mr D's position within the school as a staff member, the period of rapport building prior to the interview was less structured and formal than was the case with Chris and Vince, the study's younger participants. Time spent with Mr D involved impromptu meetings to catch up with the study's progress, lunch times in the staffroom with Mr D and other Physical Education teachers within his department, and regular email exchanges to make arrangements for meetings with other students and staff members.

Although Mr D's parents and brother still lived in WMV and he spent a significant amount time visiting them outside of his working hours, Mr D moved to a town a short distance away from the school with his wife and young child. Mr D met his wife Nicole at the school where she was his colleague, before departing to take up a role as a member of the senior leadership team within another institution.

3.4.1.4 Members of the social network

In the instance of each of the study's core participants, the members of their social networks who participated within the study were identified by Chris, Vince and Mr D. The makeup of the members of each participant's network group varied slightly depending on each of their individual situations. Whilst the methodological underpinnings for such a process of data collection will be discussed later in the chapter, it is important to note that, for each of the core participants, the individuals identified were those whom they felt to be important mechanisms of advice and guidance about their future options for education and work.

For each of the core participants, the network group included at least one of their parents, and those highlighted were, in the most part, members of their immediate family. Within the case of Mr D there was one exception, that of his old Physical

Education teacher Mr Jamerson, whose identification was borne out of a relationship developed during Mr D's time at school. The size of the network group for each of the core participants was relatively small with Mr D identifying his mother, father and Mr Jamerson, Chris identifying his mother and grandmother, and Vince identifying his mother and two cousins.

As Heath, Fuller and Paton (2008) comment, educational decision-making is a practice which is embedded within networks. Whilst it is recognised that the individuals identified by the core participants to form their network group were by no means the only people who would offer them advice and guidance related to their future educational trajectory, they were identified as those who were most influential. In the context of the study's research questions, conducting interviews with individuals from each of the core participant's network group garnered a rich opportunity to explore how the experiences of such individuals shaped the core participants' expectations for their future in education and work.

3.4.2 Staff

Participants	**School Roles**	**Method of Data Collection**
Mr Duncan	Headteacher	Semi-structured Interview
Mrs Phillips	Head of Sixth Form	Semi-structured Interview
Mr Jamerson	Assistant Head	Semi-structured Interview
Mrs Pol	Careers Adviser	Semi-structured Interview
Miss Adams	Cover Teacher (Ex-member of Senior Leadership Team)	Semi-structured Interview
Mrs Jenkins	Behaviour Lead for Key Stage 3	Semi-structured Interview
Mr D	PE Teacher	Semi-structured Interview
Mrs Nicholl	Ex Head of Sixth Form (now at a new school)	Semi-structured Interview

Table 3: Staff members

Data collection with participants who were staff members at WMHS was conducted with a view to gaining an insight into how the institution deployed practices to develop the expectations of the white working-class students toward their future in education and work. Following the procedure of purposeful sampling detailed above (Patton, 2002) I approached individuals within the staff team who had a level of responsibility for the provision of activity aligned with the development of students' educational/career orientations for interview.

The process of data collection included interviews with the school's Headteacher, Mr Duncan, members of the institution's senior leadership team, including Mr Jamerson, who was an Assistant Head, and Mrs Phillips, the Head of Sixth Form. Interviews also took place with Mrs Pol, a subcontracted Careers Adviser, and staff members such as Mrs Jenkins who held responsibility for pastoral support for the students at key stage three. All of the interviews took place at the institution during or shortly after the school day.

Taking a semi-structured approach allowed space for the participants to actively engage with the interview, facilitating a means for the respondents

> *to shift positions in the interview so as to explore alternative perspectives and stocks of knowledge. Rather than searching for the best or most authentic answer, the aim is to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing – the possible answers – that the respondents can reveal as diverse and contradictory as they might be* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.16)

As the purpose of engagement with the staff was to explore how WMHS deployed practices to support the development of white working-class students' *horizons for action,* the flexibility of the semi structured interviews provided a means by which to illicit participants thoughts and feelings on institutional practices, alongside a description of the practices employed.

The intention of the interviews was to firstly develop an understanding of how members of staff understood the dispositions of the white working-class students in relation to their geographic location, educational success and future expectations. Secondly, it was to glean an insight into how, in relational engagement with such

understanding, the institution deployed its resources to support the development of the students' future orientations.

Whilst the participants interviewed held a high level of responsibility for the development and delivery of activity to develop the future orientations of the white working-class students, they by no means constituted the only staff members within the institution holding such responsibility. Ideally, additional data collection would have taken place with all members of the WMHS Senior Leadership Team alongside the school's behaviour lead for key stage 4. However, due in part to my position as a researcher within the institution and partly due to the challenging circumstances which WMHS was operating under, securing buy in from staff members was at times difficult.

3.5 Procedure

In total the period of engagement with WMHS, its staff members, core participants and members of their social networks lasted for a period of just under 12 months. The first meeting was held with the school's Headteacher in October 2017, and I completed my final follow-up interview with Vince in September 2018. Below is a table constituting a timeline of key periods and dates within the data collection process.

Date	Activity
3rd October 2017	Initial meeting with Headteacher
October 2017- December 2017	Follow up meetings with designated staff member identified by Headteacher as primary point of contact
5th December 2017	Launch meeting with prospective participants who were students at the school to explain the project and supply them with information letters for both themselves and their parents
14th December 2017	Attendance at a parents evening to meet the prospective participants and their parents to provide further information and provide consent forms
January 2018 – April 2018	Undertaking of weekly one to one sessions with student participants during the school day
April 2018	Semi-structured interviews with core participants including Vince, Chris and Mr D

April 2018 – June 2018	Interviews with members of the core participants' social networks who they had identified as important sources of advice and guidance
September 2018	Follow up interviews with two of the core participants, Chris and Vince
January 2018 – June 2018	2018 semi-structured interviews with staff members at WMHS

Table 4: Data collection procedure

3.6 Building Rapport

As mentioned, the rapport building phase of the research took place over a four-month period, starting in January 2018 and ending April 2018. Its aim was to develop a relationship with the study's core participants and facilitate a deeper level of understanding surrounding WMHS's culture and organisation. The passage below discusses the importance of efforts to establish relationships with the study's core participants, alongside some of the challenges faced by the researcher during the process.

With Chris and Vince, this phase of the research took the form of timetabled, weekly one-to-one sessions in which we discussed life at the school, their plans for the future, and reflected on the skills or experiences which they might need to realise their educational or career ambitions. On separate occasions the sessions involved mapping out what they would like their life to look like in 10 years' time, conducting research on companies that they could approach for work experience placements, or discussing revision techniques which may suit them in preparation for their upcoming mock GCSE examinations.

With Mr D, the study's other core participant, this process was significantly less structured. As discussed in section 3.2.4, which details the process by which access to the institutions was obtained, Mr D was my designated staff contact at the institution. As such, meetings and interactions took place with a view to discussing the one-to-one sessions with the younger participants engaging in the research, or within the staff room at lunch time with other teaching staff.

When discussing how participant observation can identify and build upon relationships which are important to the future of an endeavour in qualitative research, Schensul (1999) details four benefits:

> *-It gives the researcher intuitive as well as an intellectual grasp of the way things are organised and prioritised, how people relate to one another, and the ways in which social and physical boundaries are defined.*
>
> *- It demonstrates – and over time, can confirm – patterns of etiquette, political organisation and leadership, social competition and cooperation, socioeconomic status and hierarchies in practice, and other cultural patterns which are not easily addressed or about which discussions are forbidden.*
>
> *- It endorses the presence of the researcher in the community.*
>
> *- It provides the researcher with cultural experiences that can be discussed with key informants or participants in the study site and treated as data. (p.91)*

Whilst this study did not employ participant observation as a form of qualitative data collection, the objectives of the 'rapport building' phase of the research broadly aligned with those detailed by Schensul.

In keeping with Schensul's assertion, engaging in an initial period of rapport building allowed me to become a regular visitor to the school, with a purpose endorsed by key institutional gatekeepers such as the Headteacher. It also provided a means by which I could develop a tacit as well as an intellectual grasp of the way things were organised and prioritised. This phase acted as a mechanism where I could experience first-hand how people related to each other within the clearly defined social and physical boundaries of the school. Boundaries which, as discussed in section 3.2.5, I navigated with varying degrees of success.

Encountering physical and organisational barriers during this phase such as restricted access to parts of the school, limitations to the staff members with whom I could engage, and the time I had available to conduct data collection, meant I could not embed myself within the research location to the extent required to conduct participant observation.

However, spending time with the students and staff in the school environment, provided me with an opportunity to develop relationships with each of the core participants outside of a more formalised interview setting. Conducting this preliminary exercise facilitated a means by which to find out more about their interests and future orientations prior to the semi structured interviews. Broadly speaking, the aim of the rapport building phase of the research process was to foster a situation whereby the co-construction of knowledge and meaning with the participants could occur (Brockmann, 2011).

During the research process, conversations with the core participants were not recorded and transcribed verbatim, but rather were reflected on in detailed field notes. Written in the first person, the field notes were taken in a manner which, as Mulhall notes (2003, p.312), is a method commonly used by qualitative researchers. However, when writing such notes, Emerson *et al.* also warn of the danger in taking a position which constitutes an *'omniscient point of view, assuming privileged access to the character's thoughts and feelings and motives' (2001, p.360).* As with the wider methods employed, taking a reflexive approach to the writing, and subsequent analysis of, field notes was integral to a methodology which avoided the pitfalls outlined by Emerson *et al.* A further elaboration on such a reflexive process took place in section 3.2.

3.7 Interviews

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

When selecting an appropriate means by which to develop upon the rapport building process, it was important to employ a method which captured how the core participants' *horizons for action* were formed in relational dialogue with their lived experience. As discussed in the literature review (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015; Brown, 1987) the opportunities afforded through social and geographic location have an intimate connection to the formation of futured intentions. As Willis and Trondman state

> *Cultural change cannot be entirely free floating. It cannot disconnect from its moorings, whether contemporary and social or historically as an embedded experience within cultures and cultural orientations which are inherited. It is autonomous because of the unpredictability of the ways in*

> *which it consciously and unconsciously 'handles', productively and reproductively, the social, not because it abolishes the social* (2000, p.9)

Given the focus of the research questions on *how* social and cultural resources were accessed, accrued and mobilised by the study's core participants to form future intentions, semi-structured interviews provided a vehicle through which to explore a reality which is '*constituted at the nexus of the hows and whats of experience, by way of interpretive practice – the procedures and resources used to apprehend, organize, and represent reality'* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.16).

Whilst the interviews with core participants covered similar topics, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed cultural distinctions and perspectives, built on their unique educational and socio-historical experiences, to be explored. Providing such space is something which Rubin and Rubin (2011) argue a more positivistic model of interviewing downplays *'The positivist model usually plays down the importance of cultural distinctions in its search for rules or laws, like those of physics, that apply to all people all the time'* (p.32)

As the primary concern of the study was exploring how the core participants, and those who influenced their future educational decision-making, negotiated 'what was possible', semi-structured interviews provided a means through which their stories could be accessed and elaborated upon.

Stories were used across all interviews as a tool. With the young people and members of their social networks, they provided insights into poignant key moments within their journey through education and into work. Whilst with staff members at WMHS, it facilitated a richer understanding of how they perceived white working-class males as a cohort within the school's social, educational and geographic landscape.

> *Stories are valuable to interviewers, because they almost always contain some point that an interviewee feels an urgent need to make but does not feel comfortable enough to say directly. The content may be too emotional or it may contradict the drift of the discussion* (Rubin and Rubin, 2011, p.26)

Using semi-structured interviews allowed participants to tell their story in a manner which aligned with other interviews, whilst at the same time providing room to explore those points which as Rubin and Rubin describe, an interviewee may feel and urgent

need to make, but not feel comfortable saying directly. Something which, in a more structured format, may not have been possible.

As Hammersley and Atkinson describe, semi structured interviews can be used *'as both a source of information about events, and as revealing the perspectives and discursive practices of those who produced them'* (2007, p.120).

Although prior to each of the interviews I had selected areas for discussion based on my research questions and observations during my time at WMHS, the flexibility offered by a semi-structured approach allowed space to engage more deeply with the perspectives and discursive practices of participants, as well as pursue interesting tangents within conversation that would not have been possible through a more structured approach.

The interviews conducted with teaching staff engaged with their experience of working in an institution located in a working-class town in the Black Country. Semi-structured interviews provided a rich methodological tool to investigate how such experiences shaped their perceptions of the white working-class students, exploring their understanding of how the students' future expectations were influenced by their particular social and cultural context. Conducting semi-structured interviews with a number of staff members who held responsibility for the development of the students' educational and career trajectories also provided a mechanism whereby the reasons behind practices deployed to develop the expectations of the white working-class students could be discussed with those who held responsibility for their deployment.

Conducting semi-structured interviews with the core participants provided a means by which to build upon strands of information and understanding developed through the process of rapport building. The use of semi-structured interviews after a process of rapport building meant that I was 'a known quantity' to Chris, Vince and Mr D. Through integrating the semi-structured interviews into a longer, regular period of engagement with the core participants, an environment of trust and openness was fostered; something which may have been difficult to achieve if such interviews were conducted in isolation. The process through which such trust and openness was built is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Within the interviews I was also keen to provide space for each of the core participants to provide a personal account of their journey in education up until the point of interview.

For the core participants and members of their social network, providing room within the structure of the interview for a personal account of their experiences in education and work at the beginning provided a platform on which to build the discourse that followed. As Rubin and Rubin (2011) indicate, the stories often signposted the conversation to subjects which may have been difficult to broach with a direct question, and opened new avenues for exploration.

With the staff members, the stories which I asked them to provide were personal accounts of a memorable interaction with a white working-class male, positive or negative, which immediately stood out in their memory. Often these accounts were personal and incited an emotional response from some of the staff who took part in the interviews. Several of the accounts are discussed in Chapter 6.

In the context of the wider study, data collection through interviews was an iterative process which involved taking opportunities which became present during the process of data collection. As such, although I had an idea of key individuals with whom I wanted to engage, the process was flexible and continuous (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). With regard to staff members, this meant that the opportunity to approach individuals for interview often came through my engagement with the research setting as opposed to more formal means. That is not to say that careful consideration about key members of staff to approach were not made, but rather interviews were secured in a reflexive engagement with the context of the research setting during my time in the field.

3.7.2 Social network interviews

A key consideration in the creation of a methodological framework which provided a means to understand how the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work could be shaped by the experiences of those closest to them, was the employment of a device in which engagement with such networks could be fostered.

As discussed in the literature review (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011), there has been relatively little academic endeavour into the future educational decision-making

of working-class students which draws together the influence held by the experiences of those closest to them.

Incorporating data collection with such individuals offered a mechanism by which to explore how a negotiation with the resources afforded within such networks, contributed to the intergenerational transmission of educational (dis)advantage; especially with regard to the relational negotiation of *horizons for action*. There was also a gap in the literature with specific reference to white working-class males, a gap which this study provides a means to address.

Conducting semi-structured interviews with key members of the core participants' social networks, alongside the participants themselves, constituted a methodological device by which to bring together and explore the relational, historically embedded structures which bind the formation of future educational orientations (Fuller Heath and Johnston, 2011; Hodkinson, 2008).

Building on the initial phase of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) as the mechanisms through which the core participants and staff at the school were engaged. I employed an approach based on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling

> *'involves seeking information from key informants about details of other 'in formation rich cases' in the field' (Suri, 2011, p.6)*

As Suri also contends '*it is particularly useful for capitalising on expert wisdom, identifying studies that are highly valued by different stakeholders and identifying studies outside the academic mainstream*' (Suri, 2001, p.69). In specific regard to this study, the stakeholders 'outside the academic mainstream' were those members of the core participants' social networks who acted as their most trusted advisors, and as alluded to by Heath Fuller and Johnston (2011) were key resources in the development of the participants' *horizons for action.*

Following my first interviews with Chris, Vince and Mr D, I asked them to identify key individuals within their social networks who they would turn to for advice and guidance about their future in education and work. Following their identification by the core participants, I then sought permission to approach each of the individuals identified for interview.

Identifying and approaching members of the core participants' social networks in such a manner provided a mechanism by which Chris, Vince and Mr D exerted influence on the research procedure, the value of which is succinctly described by Noy in a paper on the hermeneutics of snowball sampling below:

> *how participants exert a significant amount of influence on the overall research, how research plays onto and into exiting social dynamics, and consequently, how additional knowledge, or 'nuggets of wisdom,' can be gained (Pawson, 2006). This line of exploration seeks to reduce or mitigate divides between research facets, and help acknowledge the organic interrelationships that exist within a given research* (Noy, 2008, p. 341)

Taking a step back from the assumption that I held knowledge about who within the core participants' social networks I should be approaching for interview provided a means by which to embed my data collection within existing social dynamics that were identified by the participants themselves.

It has also been argued within previous research that the relationship held by working-class individuals with institutions of education is not always harmonious (Gillies, 2006; Gillies, 2006; Lawler, 2000) and, as such, an approach based on snowball sampling provided an alternative position from which to make contact with those individuals who Chris, Vince and Mr D had identified.

Seeking permission from the core participants to disclose that they had identified the particular members of their social network for interview provided a means by which I could approach them for interview outside of the formal mechanisms employed by the school. Indeed, in the case of Mr D, it was he who approached his parents on my behalf, setting a date, time and location for the interview to take place.

Prior to employing snowball sampling, I also made the decision that I would only approach those individuals within the core participants' social network that they had identified themselves. In a paper discussing sampling in qualitative research, Groger, Mayberry and Straker discuss 'what we didn't learn because of who would not talk to us' (1999). Whilst I did not encounter an instance where an identified member of the core participants' social networks declined to participate, I was acutely aware of who I was not speaking to nonetheless.

Chris, one of the study's core participants, identified his mother and grandmother as key individuals who he would approach for advice and guidance about his future. He also lived in the family home with his father. Although, due to his role in Chris' life and their living arrangements, I made the assumption that his father would also be identified. However, he was not.

Rather than approach Chris' father anyway, which would have had significant moral and ethical implications, the decision was made to maintain alignment with the methodological choices which had been made. Whilst it could be argued that such a decision imposed limitations on the breadth of data collected, it also ensured that the process of initiating interviews with members of the core participants' social networks was conducted in a manner which was ethically correct and methodologically rigorous.

3.8 Data Handling and Analysis

The analysis phase of the research process involved drawing together data from a range of sources which were gathered during the period of data collection. These included field notes from the four months of weekly one-to-one sessions with Chris and Vince, reflections from site visits and interviews, and the review of artefacts gathered from such areas as the school reception area and website. Recordings of 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with staff, white working-class male students and members of their social networks were also analysed. Each Interview recording was transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe software, copies of which were saved as documents on Microsoft Word.

3.8.1 Data Storage

Decisions taken, and procedures followed, with regard to data storage and protection were made in line with the ethics application submitted to the University of Wolverhampton's Ethics Committee. Physical artefacts and field notes were kept in a locked cupboard in an office at the University. Files containing transcriptions from interviews were stored on an encrypted laptop and placed in the same cupboard when not being utilised by the researcher. Copies of audio files were transferred from a dictaphone to an encrypted portable hard drive immediately after each interview, and the original copies were deleted from the device after successful upload to the hard drive.

3.8.2 Organisation of interview data

In order to fully immerse myself in the analysis, it was important that the data was organised in such a way that it could be used '*to think with'* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Initially, codes from the interviews with Chris, Vince, Mr D and their social networks were grouped together into one large set for analysis. However, while as Coffey and Atkinson assert *'the search for the perfect method of data analysis is fruitless'* (1996, p.2), organising the data in such a fashion made meaningful engagement problematic.

Firstly, as the data was combined into a single large group, it was difficult to carry out an analysis based on the participants' relationships to their individual social networks as they were grouped in with the networks of other participants. Secondly, Mr D, as a teacher currently working at the school, was in a very different temporal space to Chris and Vince who, at the time of interview, were 15 years old. Whilst Chris and Vince were currently negotiating their future educational and career trajectories, the focus of Mr D's interview was a reflection on decisions that had already been made. Such a variation in the stage that the temporal distance that the participants had travelled with regard to work and education, and reflections on what such differences meant in relation to the study's overarching research questions, led to a re-organisation of the data.

The reorganisation of the data was conducted in such a way as to allow space to reflect on the nuances between the core participants. Nuances which played an important role in understanding how the three white working-class participants negotiated their expectations for future work and education, and how such negotiations may have been shaped by the experiences of their social networks.

As such, the interview data from Chris, Vince, Mr D and their social networks was rearranged into three sets, one for each of the core participants. The fourth and final set of data was made up of semi-structured interviews with staff at the school. Due to these interviews having a broader focus, engaging with the staff members' role in supporting the development of students' future expectations at WMHS, it also made sense to separate these interviews into their own set for analysis.

3.8.3 Data analysis sets

Data set	Set Names	Total Interviews
1	Staff Interviews	8
2	Chris and Social Network	4
3	Vince and Social Network	3
4	Mr D and Social Network	4

Table 5: Data analysis sets

Although interviews were conducted with four members of Mr D's social network, the decision was taken not to include the data from Mr D's wife, Nicole, in the analytic set. Although Mr D regularly goes to Nicole for advice and guidance now, she became close to Mr D at a time when a good deal of his educational decision-making had already been made. Whilst going to his wife for advice may be important in shaping Mr D's future career progression, her influence had no impact on his decision-making during his formative years and, as such, data gathered from Nicole has been excluded from this section of analysis. However, as Nicole spent a number of years working at WMHS, eventually rising in seniority to the role of Head of Sixth Form, data she has provided has been used alongside the data provided by staff members at the school, for inclusion in the section which focused on their views.

3.8.4 Process of Interview Analysis

Initial analysis with each data set followed a process aligned to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to generate first-order, descriptive themes. Firstly, the data was transcribed by the researcher, read, and then re-read to allow a level of immersion and familiarity with the interview data. In order to sort the qualitative data, the widely used software analysis package Nvivo (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), was utilised as a mean by which to code the data. During the process of coding, the data was arranged into free tree nodes. Whilst tree nodes allowed for arrangement into main categories and sub-categories (Beazley and Richards, 2000), they were nonetheless hierarchical.

Because of the importance of the experiences of Chris, Vince and Mr D in shaping the codes, an inductive form of analysis was used to generate first order, descriptive

themes. Following this initial piece of analysis, a deductive approach was taken to the analysis of the participants' social networks based on the themes generated. Such analysis was designed to facilitate an understanding of how the orientations of Chris, Vince and Mr D toward their educational futures were shaped by those members of the social networks who they identified as important in shaping their decisions.

For the staff interview set, a similar process of inductive analysis was conducted with a view to providing space for the voices of the staff members to shape the generation of the codes. Throughout the process, it was important that my own influence as an instrument of analysis was acknowledged as I was keen to avoid a passive account of themes 'emerging' or 'being discovered' which *'denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the reader'* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80)

Following the process of digital coding, the data was then exported from Nvivo and printed on-to paper. To counter the hierarchical nature of utilising tree nodes in the coding with Nvivo, further analysis was conducted by physical interaction with the data. Using Nvivo for the initial coding, but then working with the data in a more tactile fashion, allowed for greater flexibility in the arrangement and grouping of codes, engendering a greater feeling of 'closeness' to the data.

After the collation of codes into potential themes, a check was carried out to ensure that the themes worked against the coded extracts. First order descriptive themes were then generated. Following the generation of the themes, I entered into the next stage of analysis and a more holistic process of triangulation and 'sense making' with the data began.

3.8.5 Making Sense of the Data

Whilst Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis offered an initial mechanism to work with the interview data, as I moved past the initial generation of first order descriptive themes I found that the process became increasingly complex. As discussed in the literature review, the nature of the formation of future expectations is relational (Hodkinson, 2008), and was intimately connected to the wider geographic, social and historical context of the participants.

As such, to move beyond the initial descriptive thematic analysis which included a level of data compartmentalisation, I turned to Wolcott's (1994) framework for qualitative data transformation. The process provided a means by which to bring together and triangulate the data (Flick, 2004), moving beyond the first order description and layering in understanding borne from engagement with the study's theoretical framework and learning from previous research. Within Walcott's model, three stages to the process of making sense of data gathered in qualitative research are presented; Description, Analysis and Interpretation:

> *Description addresses the question, "what is going on here"? Data consist of observations made by the researcher and/or reported to the researcher by others.*
>
> *Analysis addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them – in short, how things work……..*
>
> *Interpretation addresses processual questions of meanings and contexts: "How does it all mean?" "What is to be made of it all?"* (1994, p.12)

Following a model which progressively added depth and breadth to my thinking with the data allowed me to continue 'sense making' as a logical progression from the initial process of coding and organisation. The three-stage process outlined by Wolcott afforded the opportunity for data triangulation, bringing multiple together sources together to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research subject (Patton, 1999). I could examine interrelationships between the discourse of participants in a manner which engaged with the wider sociohistorical context and develop an understanding of *how it all means* in light of my research questions and engagement with the wider literature.

3.8.5.1 Description

The description phase of the process involved the collation of observations from field notes taken during the rapport building phase with the core participants into a reflective document, providing a short account of my experiences. A second account was then written, reflecting on my time at WMHS in a broader sense, detailing my experiences with staff members who had consented to be interviewed, and observations from site

visits to the institution. During this period, I also returned to my original interview recordings, engaging in reflection on how the data related to my observations and experiences during the time spent in the research setting.

Bringing together, and writing about, data collected from multiple sources at this stage of the process of analysis meant that I could start to address the question of *'what is going on here?'* from multiple angles. It allowed space for understanding to grow as the various accounts were layered and reflected upon in alignment with the research questions. As previously mentioned, prior to this process the interview data had been organised, coded, and descriptive themes were created. Re-approaching the themes, codes and interview snippets after a more holistic engagement with reflections and experiences gleaned throughout the data collection process facilitated a conceptual shift from 'what is going on in these interviews?' to 'what is going on in this study?'.

At this stage an initial 65-page descriptive account of the data was produced, tying in the discourse of the staff, core participants, and members of their social networks with the social, geographic and historical context in which they were situated.

3.8.5.2 Analysis

Moving from the descriptive phase to one of analysis meant developing a process by which I could

> *.....expand and extend upon a purely descriptive account with an analysis that proceeds in some careful, systematic way to identify key factors and relationships among them.* (Wolcott, 1994, p.10)

In order to achieve such an aim with the data which had been collected, I worked from the large, descriptive analysis document. The document included interview data from staff members, students and members of their social networks participating in the study, alongside reflections from the descriptive phase of the process.

Within the document, the data was systematically interrogated using the sets created for the interview analysis as a framework by which to organise the data in what would later become a draft data analysis chapter. It was at this stage where I began to systematically engage with the data in relation to the wider literature.

Working with all of the data together for the first time engendered a transition in my thinking with the data from '*what is happening?'* to '*how is it happening?'*. As multiple accounts from staff members, white working-class students and their social networks were brought to together, connections, patterns and relationships were identified. Patterns and relationships which fostered an understanding of how WMHS deployed practices to develop the expectations of white working-class students, how students drew on resources available to them to decide what was possible for their future education and work, and how such expectations were shaped by the experiences of members of the core participants' social network.

3.8.5.3 Interpretation

The final stage of the process involved a move from 'how?' to 'why?'. Through navigation of the first two stages of the framework I had developed an understanding of what was going on and how it was happening. The next, and probably the most challenging step, was to engage with the data using the thinking tools described in the study's conceptual framework.

During this phase I was careful to heed Wolcott's warning and avoid a common problem with interpretation in the *'temptation to reach to far beyond the case itself in speculating about its meanings or interpretations'* (1994, p.37), however the interpretation phase offered an opportunity to engage with the data in a way which transcends '*factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them'* (Wolcott, 1994, p.36).

It was at this stage where the thinking tools of Pierre Bourdieu, alongside later contributions by contemporary researchers mobilising the paradigm (Reay, 2019; Ingram, 2018; Friedman, 2016), were used in conjunction with Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) theory of career decision-making. Interpreting the data with the assistance of such established frameworks broadened the analytic focus. It allowed space for a picture to develop, not only of how participants' familial background, experience of education, social history and geographic location worked in relational engagement to inform what they deemed 'possible', but also how such considerations could be viewed with a wider lens. A lens which incorporated the availability and

legitimacy of capital in the field of education, and how the forms of capital which could be accessed, accrued and mobilised contributed to the reproduction of educational inequality.

In the following chapters, resultant findings from the process of data collection and analysis are explored. Chapter 4 examines how institutional practices were deployed at WMHS to develop white working-class students' future educational and career expectations. Chapter 5 examines how Chris and Vince, the study's young core participants drew on available capital in relational engagement with their educational context, geographic location, and the experiences of their social networks to frame certain educational trajectories as those which were within the realms of the possible. Chapter 6 conducts a similar examination with data provided by the study's final core participant, Mr D.

Chapter 4 - Institutional Practices and the Development of White Working-Class Students' Future Expectations

Before examining how institutional practices were deployed by staff at WMHS to develop the white working-class students' expectations toward education and work, it is first important to gain an understanding of what the staff interviewed perceived the pre-existing expectations of the students to be.

The first part of this chapter investigates how staff framed the working-class students' dispositions *'manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking'* (Bourdieu, 2017, p.27) within their the geographic and social context of the local community, before going on to explore how staff described the perceived influence of such dispositions upon students' expectations for their future education and work.

In the latter part of the chapter, findings are presented exploring how, given their understanding of the students' dispositions, staff engaged in practices which, in their view, developed the future educational and occupational expectations of students who attended the institution.

4.1 Local dispositions, educational success and expectations for the future

4.1.1 Local dispositions

A prominent feature within the discourse of staff when speaking about the dispositions of the local community was restricted spatial mobility:

> *That's massive and that's a big problem in a lot of areas that are, and specifically in WMV, because as you've discovered yourself a lot of the people that live in WMV have probably been to this school, their nans have, their aunties and uncles have, and they don't move (Mr Jamerson)*

> *WMV is insular. Frighteningly insular. Most kids know their route to school and back and don't go anywhere else (Miss Adams)*

In recent years, such immobility in working-class localities, and the complex negotiation of students' geographic choices with regard to their future education, has been the subject of both qualitative and quantitative enquiry (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Holdsworth, 2009; Christie, 2007). As discussed by Taylor (2016), neoliberal

discourses often present immobility amongst working-class communities as undesirable and, for Mr Jamerson, the intergenerational rootedness of WMV's residents was a 'big problem'.

Both Mr Jamerson and Miss Adams positioned the students' strong ties to the local area as a cause for concern, commenting that such a relationship to the locality not only limited students' access to information about alternative educational trajectories, but also restricted their opportunity to access alternative cultural resources such as museums, which lay outside of WMV:

> *Ours tend to stay in the west midlands. Most, a lot went to West Midlands City. Lots do finance. Financing does worry them. Paying for the accommodation. We do have students who do go away. We've had some go to Kings in London, one go to America each year. One on a full scholarship so it depends. Those who tend to go away are perhaps sometimes are more affluent background (Miss Philips)*

Similarly, when discussing the educational trajectories of those that did enter into HE, which in 2018 totalled 70% of the sixth form's final year students, Mrs Phillips asserted that the most common option for study was the local Post-92 University. In Mrs Phillips' opinion, finance was a big influence on the students' future orientations, making them more likely to select an institution based on it being a commutable distance from home, rather than pay additional costs for accommodation. Evidence of teachers holding similar views has been identified in the recent research by Evans and Donnelly (2018), however it was also noted that whilst narratives surrounding debt as a deterrent were relatively homogenous amongst teachers, perceptions of debt amongst students were widely varied based on the particularities of their socio-cultural context.

Aside from the financial implications of HE participation, Mr Duncan, the Headteacher of West Midlands High, suggested that study at university, especially away from home, was an activity that did not align with the normative expectations of many working-class families within WMV.

> *I don't know whether this is the correct terminology. I'm from WMV, I'm from this background and people like me don't do that. People like me do this. (Mr Duncan)*

The notion of study within HE by working-class students as a middle-class practice which is not for 'the likes of them', and the discomfort which permeates attempts to develop the middle-class dispositions required to succeed at university, is well documented in educational research (Ingram, 2018; Reay, 2017; Ward, 2017; Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Ball, 2005; Archer and Hutchings, 2000) .

To use an explanatory tool offered by Ball, Reay and David (2002), in Mr Duncan's view many of the working-class students at the school saw HE participation as a *contingent choice*, one which was outside of their everyday lived experience and therefore did not fit with their normative expectations for future education and work.

However, an important difference between Ball, Reay and David's study involving students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the staff at WMHS' perception of the white working-class students, was parental engagement. The research (2002) found that amongst families from minority ethnic backgrounds '*there may well be emotional support and high levels of encouragement and expectation within the family for the achievement of credentials'* (p. 337). During the interviews, both Mr Duncan and Miss Adams reflected that, in their opinion, this was not necessarily true for the white working-class students at WMHS:

> *Whereas the student from the lower social economic background, not always support from the parents, not always. You see this is interesting as you think it through isn't it I think the support from parents in the lower socio-economic field tends to be around behaviour (Mr Duncan)*
>
> *And quite often the parents when you phone them and say this is what they've done wrong, they say can you prove it? Are you sure it was them? And they'll challenge that as well (Miss Adams)*

Mr Duncan felt that, in some instances, support from parents regarding their child's schooling was not always present and, in the cases where it was, it was more likely to come in the form of representations about behaviour rather than the child's academic progress. The preference of working-class parents, specifically mothers, to act on their child's behalf and intervene with a school for issues relating to behaviour rather than academic success, is a common theme amongst research with parents and their

experiences of educational inequality (Gillies, 2006; Reay, 2005). However, Miss Adams felt that often such interventions were problematic.

When recounting her interactions with working-class parents, Miss Adams perceived some of their attempts to advocate on behalf of their child as oppositional to the school's efforts to maintain high standards of behaviour. Similar to findings by Lareau (2011), she positioned such interventions by working-class parents as attempts to subvert the institution's efforts to maintain high standards, constructing their actions as ignorant of the acceptable practices within the institution, challenging the school's authority.

Interestingly Mrs Pol, the institution's sub-contracted careers advisor, related a different experience. Reflecting on her interactions with the parents of working-class students, she felt that they were polite and eager to receive advice and guidance about their child's career options:

> *The working-class parents I have had absolutely no problem with at all. In fact when you hand them a bit of help they are so grateful because they get nothing. The Government is basically saying at the moment you can do it on your own. (Mrs Pol)*

Mrs Pol's differing experience with the parents of the working-class students could be partially explained by her position within the institution. As a careers advisor who worked at the school for one day a week, it could be argued that the 'gap between institutional values and expectations, and the day to day lives of the mothers' (Gillies, 2006) may have been narrower for her than other staff at the school. Also, because Mrs Pol would often be contacting parents with an offer of work-related support for their offspring rather than to challenge behaviour deemed by the institution to be unfavourable, it is possible that communication by Mrs Pol was not received with such suspicion. Similar to recent research into the role of community-based link workers with families of white working-class students in London (Fretwell *et al.,* 2018), it could be argued that the comparatively weak tie to the institution held by Mrs Pol acted as means to engender trust.

Mrs Pol's position as a long serving careers advisor also meant that, during the interview, she often reflected on the impact of funding cuts by the Government to the provision of youth services offering careers advice and guidance. Whilst a recent

article by Holdsworth (2017) argued that in a climate of austerity young people are expected to 'run faster to stand still' (p.296), comparing young peoples' attempts to gain employment with running on a treadmill, Mrs Pol's choice of metaphor related to household furnishings:

> *They haven't just taken the carpets, they've moved all of the furniture out of the building (Mrs Pol)*

Of the interviews conducted with staff, perhaps again due to the comparatively unique position she held at the school, it was only Mrs Pol who reflected on the wider consequences of cuts to public services outside of education, and its possible implications for the development of students' expectations for future education and work:

> *I would say the minority of kids are confident and have got enough self-esteem to know what they want to do, and to go away and do it. I think you're probably talking 70/30%. 30% who are confident to know what they and to do and to get on and do it. I think the other 70% would like to do something but haven't got the confidence or the belief in their own ability to do it (Miss Adams)*

Miss Adams framed the ability of WMHS students to develop dispositions toward HE participation as directly related to their levels of confidence. For her, low confidence and self-esteem amongst the students impeded their chances of developing strong dispositions toward particular educational trajectories. Within wider literature concerning transitions to university for working-class students, it has been highlighted that the process of developing dispositions toward HE participation involves a complex negotiation of risk and reward (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Archer and Hutchings, 2000) . Such risks take a range of forms including financial insecurity, alienation and the possible psycho-social injury (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009).

Within the academic literature, the ability to confidently frame HE participation as 'possible' is inextricably linked to the social, cultural and economic resources at their disposal. However, within Miss Adams account, the connection between personal attributes such as confidence 'in their ability to do it', and the provision of the relevant capital in order to achieve it, was not strongly made.

Research has highlighted the potentially harmful positioning of individual characteristics such as confidence as drifting free of the structural conditions in which they reside. Something which academics argue strong characteristic of discourse within a post-industrial, neoliberal field of education (Baker, 2016; Furlong, 2013; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013; Spohrer, 2011).

4.1.2 Educational Success

> *The kids who are going to fly, will fly, and we can help them fly. And we have got those extremes. I mean we've got the 3/4 A-Level A* kid who gets a scholarship to go to a university in America, and then we've got the student in year 11 who hopefully, with a bit of help, might get pass - well get a BTEC - and get a grade at GCSE English and Maths (Miss Adams)*

During the interviews, a number of the staff made comment on the wide range of academic ability present amongst the students at the school. When reflecting on the attainment differences between the students at WMHS, Miss Adams positioned the academically successful students as those that would 'fly'. In a similar vein to Miss Philips, when speaking about the educationally successful students, Miss Adams drew on the example of a small number of students gaining a scholarship to an American university as an illustration of the potential opportunities available to the high achieving students. Whilst research has suggested that experiences such as study abroad and attendance at Russell Group universities was common practice amongst elite institutions of secondary education (Davey, 2012), for students at WMHS, individuals following such educational trajectories for were the exception rather than the rule.

However, when Miss Adams spoke about the lower attaining students who hopefully, with a bit of help, might get a pass, framing of lower attainment suggested that this outcome was less desirable. In alignment with findings by Reay (2009), the discourse of Miss Adams implied a hierarchy of legitimacy for certain trajectories into further education and work.

Through the use of language such as 'flying' and referencing a scholarship to an American University as the most favourable outcome, Miss Adams' dialogue suggested that it was a progression to those spaces within HE which were most commonly occupied by the white middle class that was most desirable.

> *I wonder whether a lot of our students would see success as doing brilliantly in exams, going on to university, whether that would be all their aspirations. Or whether some children would see getting a grade 3 in maths, for them is an amazing amazing performance, and I don't know whether we focus on that well enough, either for me, for the school, or for the wider educational agenda because if you're not getting a 4 or a 5 it doesn't matter what you tell the children, they perceive that as failure (Mr Duncan)*

Mr Duncan, on the other hand, took a more nuanced view, citing that for some students obtaining a level three in maths at GCSE would be an achievement. Within the dialogue, he questioned the approach of a wider neoliberal agenda of education which in Reay's words '*works to positively affirm middle-class identities, acting as a means of finding yourself as a successful bright learner*' (2009, p.24). During the interview, he reflected that there were potentially harmful psychological and social consequences inherent for the students in framing their best efforts as failure. For Mr Duncan, an approach which suggested that anything but attaining the highest grades and continuing on an academic trajectory after they finished their GCSEs was undesirable, had significant implications for the students' self-esteem.

Given the nature of the institution's performance in examinations, with 30% of students achieving a grade 5 or above in English and Maths at GCSE in 2017/18, a discourse which positioned attaining highest academic credentials as the only respectable option, it could be argued, would be a harmful discourse for a significant number of the institution's working-class student population.

4.1.3 Expectations for the Future

Interestingly, although Miss Adams positioned confidence and self-esteem amongst the students as an individualised characteristic, she later reflected that their inclination to stay within the boundaries of the locality came in part from the area's historical links to industry and manufacturing; a sentiment which has been reflected in research investigating the impact of an industrial legacy on the identities of young males in working-class communities (Ward, 2015). Her discourse suggests a belief that there was still a culture, especially amongst the white working-class community, of investing in routes into work traditionally associated with the working-class male as 'bread winner' (Kelan, 2008). However, she noted that, since the decline of the area's main

industries (Willis,1988), opportunities to enter into such employment for students leaving the school were few and far between:

> *WMV lost its main industries. So the idea of you worked hard, you went to school and you automatically got a job in Chubb or Yale has now gone. So there's nothing to go for, there's no careers to go for. And that's a big thing, particularly with white working-class lads (Miss Adams)*

> *I do think if you've got a dad who perhaps is a plumber, or who has his own business yeah, then the kids will go oh I want to be a plumber because my dad's got plumbing and I'm going to work for my dad, I hear that a lot (Mrs Jenkins)*

Such an inclination to stay local meant that, for Mrs Jenkins, expectations about the future were formed through their experiences with family members who had secured employment in the local area. The sentiments conveyed by Mrs Jenkins reflect wider research by Fuller, Heath and Johnston (2011), demonstrating the influence of multiple generations of family living and working in WMV on the future intentions of the white working-class students currently in attendance at the school.

Students developing their expectations based on what were perceived as working-class career trajectories ran counter in some instances to the more middle-class aspirations for the learners' future in education held by staff members. In Mr Duncan's view, some students held aspirations for educational pathways which he believed were below their capability:

> *I think it's very very difficult to generalise. If I'm honest I think I probably see more of the opposite so children aspiring to do things that are below what they are capable of doing (Mr Duncan)*

Previous research has suggested that a sole focus on raising student aspiration by staff in schools is effectively asking them to do a play without the script (Bok, 2010), framing for social immobility as a 'choice' made by the student independently of the socio-economic barriers the students may face. Whilst Mr Duncan was keen not to generalise, his comment suggests a belief that, amongst the working-class student population, resisting efforts made by teachers to facilitate middle-class educational trajectories was a choice that some students made.

However, when Mr Duncan spoke of 'being capable', it could also be argued that he was speaking about the educational trajectories which were held by staff as an expectation given the students' predicted attainment. As highlighted in the literature review by the work of Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick (2010), for some working-class students, *'educational failure was a constant threat and they were genuinely unsure as to how they might fare in the examination' (p.96).* It is worthy of reflection that although the staff at the institution displayed a level of confidence in the academic capability of some working-class students, this may not necessarily have been reflected by the students themselves. In fact, given the reflections by Miss Adams provided above related to the confidence and self-esteem of students, it could be argued that a choice by students to 'play it safe' was a pragmatic negotiation (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1996) made to guard against the risk of potential failure.

Mr Duncan also felt that, similar to Miss Jenkins, future-orientated decisions were influenced by individuals within the students' immediate social network. Reflecting on the impact of advice given to him by his parents, he highlighted the difference between receiving guidance from trusted members of his social network, and individuals whom he felt were less like him:

> *So what they set as aspirational goals was within the sphere of their own experience, and I trusted them, so when other people spoke to me about their sphere of influence and their sphere of aspiration, they weren't me. And I would guess that a lot of white working-class boys think the same (Mr Duncan)*

In his opinion, Mr Duncan's identity as a middle-class professional was viewed as 'other' (Crozier, Burke and Archer, 2016) by the working-class students at the school. For Mr Duncan this meant that the guidance he offered to working-class students about their future education and employment carried less weight than advice received by students' close friends and family who had shared experiences and dispositions.

Mrs Jenkins felt that, due to the requirements placed upon the school by external inspection bodies such as the Government and OFSTED, there was a misalignment between what the institution could do to provide opportunities for students that complimented their future expectations, and what they were expected to offer to maintain school standards:

> *If that's what that kid strives for, and wants, why aren't we pushing them to that? Not sitting, without being disrespectful to modern foreign languages and citizenship and all those. Why aren't they saying to those kids go and do a day at Jaguar, do two days work release. Why aren't they having those chances? (Mrs Jenkins)*

Perceptions of a misalignment between the subjects offered at the institution and the future expectations of the working-class students was also mirrored by Miss Adams. In her opinion, it was the attitude of many students that what they were learning did not reflect their ambitions for the future:

> *I know they'll either say I know what I want to do and I don't need Geography, or I don't need history because I want to be a bailiff so I don't need my exams. Or what's the point of doing exams because I won't get a job anyway. (Miss Adams)*

Such a belief holds commonalities with a number of studies exploring how white working-class students have historically negotiated their identity within the setting of a school (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Brown, 1987; Willis, 1977) , however in Miss Adam's view, such an attitude also included a resignation that in a precarious, post-industrial labour market such as that discussed by Savage (2015), secure employment in a working-class job may not be available.

When speaking on a similar topic, Mrs Pol recognised that the students' intentions toward future careers were limited to those pathways presented as options either by WMHS or by members of their social network:

> *If you don't know what an actuary is, or a system analyst or whatever. Why would you go for that job if you don't know what it is? Again information. But the information that is out there is very poor (Mrs Pol)*

For Miss Pol, the students' future decisions were not issues that were free floating (Archer, Pratt and Phillips, 2001) and related to the students' hopes or ambitions alone, but were conditioned by structural forces, dictating the objectified cultural and social capital to which the students could access and deploy when developing orientations toward their future work and education.

Limited access to forms of social and cultural capital which, in Mr Duncan's opinion, could serve to develop favourable dispositions toward geographic mobility meant that, for those working-class students who were intending to study within HE, it was likely to be at a local provider:

> *they will talk about universities in Birmingham, they take a massive risk and go to Keele, but they don't go Oxford, Cambridge, erm London based universities, and that may not be the right option for them and I understand that, but it's not in their discussion, it's not in their vocabulary, it's not in their approach (Mr Duncan)*

Whilst, as mentioned by other staff, Mr Duncan appreciated that access to economic capital may influence the students' choice to stay local, he also believed that students lacked the experiences necessary to constitute study away from home within their *horizons for action* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). For Mr Duncan, geographic mobility was a possibility that, due to the circumstance of their location and class background, could rarely be realised.

Interestingly, Miss Phillips reflected that, when it came to the barriers which working-class students may face when considering applying to HE, many of teachers' views were judgements based on what they could surmise from the students' background:

> *I think the barriers, we don't tend to know all the reasons why. We don't have conversations about why don't you. We don't have those conversations. It's not sort of mentioned really, it's only what we can surmise from what we know about their backgrounds. (Miss Philips)*

Faced with a lack of 'hard' evidence with regard to why students at WMHS chose certain trajectories over others, the identification of a reason for the working-class students' non-participation in HE was led largely by government discourse surrounding a deficit of aspiration (Baker, 2016), and informed guesswork based on what teaching knew about the individuals in question.

4.2 Institutional Practices to Develop Expectations

Staff at WMHS cited the students' local dispositions, confidence and their academic attainment as central to their understanding of the white working-class students' orientations toward future education and work. At times there was a recognition of the

relational nature of the formation of such expectations, with staff making comment upon the area's industrial legacy and the influence of those individuals who the students deemed their most trusted advisors. However, there was also a positioning of dispositions formed by close historical ties to the locality as problematic. Often, though not always, within the discourse of staff future intentions which were deemed most preferable were associated with the students embarking on educational trajectories aligned with social and geographic mobility.

Given the understanding gleaned from staff perceptions of the white working-class students' educational and career expectations, the next section addresses how, given such understanding, the institution deployed practices to support the development of students' future orientations.

When talking of the mechanisms in place to support such aims, staff discussed the school's careers program, their problematisation of the culture of staying local, the importance of pastoral support, and the impact of curriculum change on their ability to effectively support the students.

4.2.1 Careers Advice and Guidance

Mrs Phillips' role as a teacher included responsibility for the institution's provision of career advice and guidance alongside her duties as a Physical Education teacher and Head of Sixth Form. As such, Mrs Phillips felt that an important mechanism deployed by the institution to support the development of students' expectations toward their future in education and work was their programme of careers advice and guidance:

> *In years 7 to 13 we have a careers programme. So once a week in tutor time there's schemes of work that the tutor should be following. When it comes to year 11 they all have an independent interview with an independent careers advisor to get some impartial advice, and they all get one of those (Mrs Phillips)*

> *But their problem is space, so they have nowhere to leave information. But they've just moved the Sixth Form Centre and we might be able to have a library in there. Some of the teachers keep things in offices, but obviously I get my information from all sorts of places, but we have nowhere to store it. (Mrs Pol)*

Following the publication of the Gatsby Benchmarks in 2014 (Holman, 2014), and its subsequent adoption by the Careers Enterprise Company as a method in which to measure school career provision, WMHS published a policy on its website detailing how their work to support the students' future decision-making was embedded into the curriculum from when they started school in year 7, to when they left in year 11. This involved a series of interventions across the school years designed to help the students make informed decisions about their future in education and employment upon leaving the institution.

Alongside the provision within the curriculum, students also had an interview with Mrs Pol, the schools sub-contracted careers advisor, once they reached their final year of schooling. Due to Mrs Pol only being in present at the school for one day a week, she did not have a designated hub in which to base her activity from. This meant that follow up conversations with parents after careers interviews were usually conducted by telephone.

Mrs Pol felt that a lack of allocated space within the school in which to display information relating to opportunities for work and study made it difficult for students to locate information about possibilities for future engagement in education and work. As outlined by the research of Donnelly (2015), the framing of information about students' options plays an important role in their future decision-making. For Mrs Pol, the absence of a bank of objectified cultural capital from which the students could draw information restricted their opportunity to gain new knowledge about the educational routes which they could position as possible:

> *it's exposing them to what's available out there. And you know obviously you're taking them out of lessons so it affects their learning, you've got to pay for them to get there. But I think exposing them to as many different career pathways, you know, or having people come into work with them so it's not just us saying to them you've got to do this, this and this because we're teachers. (Mrs Phillips)*

Whilst Mrs Phillips felt that the careers programme was a good basis from which to conduct further activity, she articulated her belief that in order to make an informed choice, students needed exposure to a range of different career pathways and

information from individuals who had successfully taken different routes into employment.

Although Mrs Phillips was keen to organise such experiences for students to facilitate access to new forms of social and cultural capital, the pressures of the curriculum meant that opportunities to give students exposure to different areas of employment, or bring individuals from such areas into the school to speak to students, were limited.

Evidence of such pressures can be observed in the detail of the institutional careers policy. Rather than offering the opportunity for tailored engagement with employers dependent on the students' age and interests, pupils attended a repeat of same in house 'Careers Convention' organised by the institution five times between years 7 and 11. As Mrs Phillips articulated, such provision was not because staff at the school did not want to offer a richer provision for the institution's students but rather that, with increased scrutiny on school performance from the neoliberal field of secondary education (Wilkins, 2015) and limited resources, it was the best offering that their resources could allow:

> *If they're just an ordinary working-class kid, from an ordinary working-class home, and they're doing ok at school, unless the school has support like me there'll be nothing (Mrs Pol)*

Cuts to funding by the Government in the provision of careers advice and guidance, which Mrs Pol believed had resulted in over half of the publicly-funded careers staff being made redundant in West Midlands City, had left working-class students in a precarious position. Mrs Pol felt that there were significant implications for working-class students who were doing well enough not to warrant increased attention, but not well enough to warrant special attention (Roberts, 2012).

The strategies employed by middle-class parents, drawing on the social, cultural and economic capital present within the family (Vincent et al., 2015; Crozier et al., 2008; Reay et al., 2007; Ball, 2003) to broaden the suite of opportunities deemed available to their child for their future education and work are well documented. However, in Mrs Pol's opinion, with little or no access to such resources available for working-class parents, cuts to funding for careers advice by government, and building pressure on schools to focus on exam results, many working-class students were left with very little

support to develop expectations for the future outside of their immediate *horizon for action* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997).

4.2.2 Countering the Culture of 'Staying Local'

As discussed in section 4.1.1, during the interviews some of the staff problematised a perceived culture of 'staying local' amongst WMHS students and their families, arguing that WMV was 'frighteningly insular'. An important role which many of the staff interviewed felt that they played, with reference to the deployment of practices to support the development of students' future expectations, was to counter the culture of staying local:

> *but moving them into those experiences where they go eeeeeeeekkkk and how they then learn to act is probably really really really important for white working-class children. Because again, massively stereotypical, but most won't go beyond Birmingham (Mr Duncan)*

> *it's a life that they've never experienced before you know. They'll go on to a campus to a Russell Group University, they be like wow. And some of them will be genuinely overwhelmed by that, like you know, I wana bit of this you know. But others just are very much homely (Mr D)*

Research has shown that, for many families in working-class communities, moving away to university is perceived as an endeavour which is fraught with risk, holding potential for negative experiences and undesirable outcomes (Holdsworth, 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay, 2001). For Mr Duncan, exposing the students to new middle-class environments which were previously outside of their experience was a mechanism by which the school could facilitate the development new forms of capital. Capital which, for the working-class students at WMHS, would lie out of reach within the confines of their locality (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

Introductions to such environments often took the form of visits to Russell Group universities and, as described by Mr D, were met by a mixed reaction from students. For some, exposure to the campus of an elite university served to encourage them to set their sights on admission, whilst for others it served to further entrench a belief that such an experience was 'not for the likes of them' (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). Visits to such institutions were usually reserved for those students displaying the

highest levels of attainment and were not regularly timetabled. As such, although the students gained an experience of such an environment, it was not one in which they could build a level of familiarity:

> *I took some students to Ernst and Young last week for the EY foundation. Year 10. They were mixed, all had to be PP, middle to high ability to do an employability skills workshop and they got a lot from that. So it's things like that where you're taking them offsite to a company to do that which has a big impact. And it's sort of made them raise their aspirations a little bit (Mrs Phillips)*

Alongside trips to universities, WMHS also provided opportunities for working-class students who were eligible for Pupil Premium funding to take part in one-off visits to employers such as Ernst and Young. Mrs Phillips reflected that the chance to experience the work environment of a large company and engage in an employability skills workshop benefitted the students. It is interesting to note, however, that rather than focus on the skills which the students may have developed during the employability workshop, Mrs Phillips discussed its importance as a mechanism by which to raise their aspirations. For Mrs Phillips, encouraging students to include employment at such companies within their horizons of possibility closely aligned with the neoliberal framing of aspiration presented in Government discourse (Spohrer, 2015), and its historical use as an 'effective' mechanism by which to widen access to HE (Harrison and Waller, 2018).

In recent research, scholars have contested the effectiveness of such activity as a standalone means by which to increase access to HE (St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013; Khattab, 2015), framing the use of the 'raising aspiration' narrative as a problematic discourse within the neoliberal field of secondary education.

However, as illustrated by the discourse of Mr Duncan, Mr D and Mrs Phillips, providing an opportunity for some students to visit these middle-class settings of education and work, played a central role in their efforts to counter the culture of staying local. As highlighted by Mr D, it was suggested that through fleeting exposure to such spaces, it made the idea of geographic and social mobility through moving away to study at an 'elite' university more desirable.

4.2.3 Pastoral Support

Counter to discourses of increased spatial mobility and promoting middle-class educational trajectories, the tone of discussion from staff was decidedly different when speaking about individual students. During the interviews, I asked Miss Adams, Mrs Jenkins and Mr Jamerson to recount an interaction with a white working-class student that stood out for them (appendix 6). In framing such a request, I stipulated that these recollections could be positive or negative, and it was only important that they recounted the first instance which entered into their heads.

What followed were, at times, moving accounts of personalised support that they had offered for students. In the case of Mrs Jenkins, her mentorship of a student after near expulsion from school facilitated his acceptance at a local Post-92 University to study an undergraduate degree in Criminology. Four years later the student re-initiated contact with Mrs Jenkins to tell her that he had got the highest possible grade in his degree and that

> *it was the best days work you ever did the day you took me on and worked with me (Mrs Jenkins)*

In Mr Jamerson's case, he had supported a student after the death of his mother, liaising with social services on his behalf, and working to avoid him being taken into care. Years later, Mr Jamerson saw the student at a restaurant, discovering that he now had a job, and a family, of his own:

> *He's got a job now, he's got his own family and we saw them. We went out for some food for one of the staff's birthday and he come in with his brother, and they were just so grate…, not grateful but appreciative of what we'd done for them. And for them to say that to us it was just like wow. That's kind of blows your mind really when you've had an impact on someone that's completely changed the course of their lives (Mr Jamerson)*

Interestingly, within the accounts given by the staff members about individual students, tales of increased geographic mobility and other narratives associated with aspiration toward middle-class futures did not feature. Instead the staff gave examples of where their interventions had facilitated positive outcomes for the students after leaving the

institution which were still very much tied to their locality and working-class background:

> *But due to financial restraints, we've got an issue at the moment because literally there's an assistant Headteacher, and there's two pastoral officers and that's it. There's a safeguarding officer as well, a designated safeguarding officer, but in terms of support that's it. There's three teaching assistants but they're all tied up with the learning needs of some of the students who have got statements. (Mr Jamerson)*

> *But then when you've got the pressures of OFSTED and everyone else. Because they don't measure the pastoral system other than how high is attendance and high how are you're fixed term exclusions and what are you doing about it. But they'll measure how well you're doing on English, Science, Maths P8, things like that so it's difficult. Budgets don't allow freedom so it's difficult (Mr Jamerson)*

However, Mr Jamerson believed that, due to funding cuts, pastoral provision within the institution had dramatically diminished. Alongside a reduction of economic capital, he implied that remaining resources were allocated to meet the performative measures used by the OFSTED (Wilkins, 2015) in order to protect the institution.

The pressure discussed with regard to a tension between academic standards and student wellbeing, has been a theme within the discourse of the UK education system for a number of years (Jones, 2006). Examples of such tensions, like the one highlighted by Mr Jamerson, had significant implications for the staff and students at WMHS. In Mr Jamerson's opinion, the pressure felt by staff to raise academic standards across institutions which, as they were a metric used by the OFSTED would be the fastest way to change the school's unfavourable rating, meant that funding was streamed toward improving school performance rather than pastoral support.

4.2.4 Navigating the Curriculum

> *...there are a wider variety of subjects, or courses on offer. Particularly sort of now where we are with engineering and those courses, so they were never something that was offered to us. We could never have taken*

> *manufacturing engineering or manufacturing design when we were in key stage 4. So things like that, I think have improved definitely. (Mr D)*

Alongside the pressure felt by staff at WMHS to make high attainment in exams a primary objective, participants discussed the range of subject options on offer at the school.

In Mr D's opinion, the school now offered a range of subjects which aligned to what he perceived to be the interests of the white working-class students. This, he believed, had benefitted many of the students, providing a means to accrue capital which they could later mobilise when looking for employment opportunities in the local area. In many cases, Mr D thought such subjects directly aligned with working-class students' expectations for future employment; expectations which, in his view, were formed in relational engagement with the historical availability of employment opportunities within a working-class town in the Black Country (Willis.,1988):

> *We didn't have prescriptive Government going we're going to introduce something called P8 and if the children don't choose these things it won't count towards. Things like these are the list of accreditation, well some accreditation now are more important than other accreditation, and if you don't do this accreditation it won't count for you as a school and you will be criticised because you haven't got more points (Mr Duncan)*

However Mr Duncan, the school's Headteacher, articulated his belief that reforms to secondary education made by the Coalition Government (Garner, 2012) restricted the school's ability to make adequate provision for routes into further education and work which deviated from an aspiration of immediate progression to HE.

With the introduction of such measures as Progress 8 (P8) and the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), Mr Duncan felt that the school was being penalised for offering subjects which were judged to be of less value than the 'traditional', and arguably more middle-class (Adams, 2013; Abrahams, 2018), subjects privileged within the new system. Such concerns were reflected in the number of students at WMHS completing the EBacc, which in 2017/18 was over 30% below the national average for schools in England:

> *So what you've ended up doing is creating curriculum which are more aligned with educational outcomes because you have to protect the school and the performance of the school, rather than relate it to individual student need. Morally that's not right (Mr Duncan)*

Offering the opportunity for local students to study subjects which aligned to their expectations for future employment was, for many of the staff interviewed, an important role that the institution performed. However, a consequence of facilitating such provision was an undesirable outcome in school performance metrics used by the OFSTED. Although the introduction of the EBacc is a relatively new development in educational policy, a body of research is already growing (Hobbs, 2016) examining the possibility that it may further entrench existing educational inequalities.

As illustrated by Lingard (2014), it was the case for WMHS, as with many schools within working-class communities, that there was an imperative to

> *focus more on improving test scores than those with middle-class clientele, which reduces the likelihood of socially just curriculum provision, narrowing opportunities for young people from poor families to access the high-status capitals necessary for educational success (p.726)*

4.3 Discussion: School practices to develop future expectations

Amongst the staff interviewed, there was evidence to suggest that geographic mobility and progression to HE were a *doxic aspiration* or a '*belief which escapes questioning*' that is taken as common sense (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.98). As such, many of the staff interviewed positioned the local dispositions of the students and members of their social network, who in some instances had also been to WMHS, as problematic.

In their view, such a strong tie to the local community restricted opportunities for students to accrue middle-class forms of social and cultural capital that were present outside of WMV. In the opinions of some staff, the dispositions of students toward staying local limited their exposure to the middle-class educational and occupational settings which they were encouraged to aspire toward.

Through the comments of Miss Adams surrounding the students' confidence and Mr Duncan's assertion that some learners aspired to trajectories below their capability,

there is evidence that the confidence and aspirations of students were, in some instances, framed by staff as 'choice'. Within such discourse it was also apparent that, at times, a connection was not always made between the notion of choice and the access, accruement and mobilisation of the forms of capital which were necessary for students frame them strongly within their *horizons for action* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). As touched on earlier in the analysis, such assertions align closely with wider neoliberal educational discourses which constituted the *doxa* '*the point of view of those who dominate by dominating the state and who have constituted their point of view as universal by constituting the state'* (Bourdieu, 1988) of the field in which the institution operated.

There was also a recognition within the discourse of staff that a trajectory which lead to HE was not the most suitable route for all of the institution's students given the wide range of academic ability present amongst the cohort. However, in alignment with the *doxic aspiration* of the field, successfully securing places at Russell Group universities and travel abroad were often held up by staff as examples of student success.

Although staff did acknowledge the role of restricted access to social, cultural and economic resources in shaping the students' *horizons for action*, some staff spoke of an unwillingness by students to engage in activity which would cultivate the relevant forms of capital for more middle-class educational trajectories which were privileged as most desirable. When Mr Duncan spoke about such aversion, he reflected it was often linked to a perceived risk of educational failure and its consequences. However, there was also a perception that, for the WMHS students, the aversion spread to anything which could be considered a *contingent choice,* lying outside of the locality, or that of the immediate experience of their social network.

Within the institution, due in large part to the constraints under which it operated, access to objectified cultural capital in the form of careers resources and opportunities for students to develop new forms of social capital were limited to what the staff at WMHS had the time, space and financial resources to offer.

When staff spoke of the practices which were deployed by the institution to develop the white working-class students' future expectations there was a tension, and at times a conflict, between what they felt were the needs of the individual student and the practices in which they engaged to encourage HE participation. When speaking about

students collectively, staff often aligned their discourse with efforts to inculcate middle-class educational dispositions amongst the cohort. However, when speaking about their experience with individual students, giving examples of where they felt their interventions had most impact, staff recounted instances where they had supported students in navigating difficult personal and social circumstances.

As highlighted in previous research (Ball, 2003; Reay, 2002; Archer and Hutchings, 2000), for many working-class students, navigating the process of entry into HE is an endeavour which is fraught with risk; risks which are intrinsically linked to the socioeconomic circumstances in which they reside. However, rather than aiming to redress the balance by delivering provision which would seek to level the playing field, staff gave examples of exposure to new environments for groups of students designed to 'raise aspiration'. Within the interviews, both aspiration and confidence were often presented as an individualised endeavour for the students; an endeavour which, at times, sat separately from structural pressures dictated by their location and class position.

Practices such as the 'aspiration raising' activity which the school deployed aligned closely to the *doxic aspiration* presented by the neoliberal field of secondary education, championing spatial mobility and middle-class educational trajectories as the most desirable outcome for students after finishing their compulsory education.

However, policies linked to curriculum reform have instigated a shift in the *doxa* of the field of secondary education in recent years. Such reforms have narrowed the range of subjects deemed to be legitimate through implementation of the EBacc, whilst at the same time introducing stringent performative measures to encourage compliance.

There were examples within the institution of practices, specifically surrounding the introduction of the EBacc, which were *heterodoxic,* contesting the arbitrary nature of the reforms. Decisions taken by the school, such as offering qualifications which did not contribute toward the metrics which school effectiveness was judged by, but closely aligned to what the staff perceived to be the interests of the working-class students, were taken despite the risk of impeding the school's performance in league tables and increased scrutiny by OFSTED.

Such choices were made because staff felt, regardless of the consequences, that offering the students the chance to study subjects like engineering aligned most

closely to their interests within their local context. However, this also created a paradox within the institution whereby some practices aligned to the *doxic aspiration* of the field, positioning middle-class educational trajectories as the favourable outcome, whilst at the same time *heterodoxic* practices resisted curriculum change, offering subjects which closely aligned to the students' working-class dispositions.

Bourdieu uses the term *illusio* (1993) to describe the unconscious investment of social actors in the rules, or the *doxa* of the field in which they participate. Differing from Davye's (2012) research in a UK-based independent school where a full investment *illusio* of the field was described, the paradoxical practices deployed at the school to develop students' future expectations suggest only a partial investment by the institution in the *illusio* of the neoliberal field of secondary education.

Such a partial investment points toward what Bourdieu would describe as hysteresis, or 'a structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.83), within the culture of the institution. Although the school deployed practices to promote the 'personal responsibility' of social mobility, a concern for the students' wellbeing fostered a resistance to a full investment through adherence to curriculum reform. For the students, this meant that they were receiving conflicting messages. On the one hand some were being encouraged to aspire toward Russell Group universities, being presented with students who had become geographically mobile as examples of success. On the other they were given the opportunity to take subjects at GCSE which aligned to their familial dispositions and working-class career orientations.

Chapter 5 - Negotiating Future Expectations: Hopes, Expectations and Risks

In the following chapter, findings are presented from interviews with two of the study's core participants, Chris and Vince. The interviews with Chris and Vince focused on their plans for the future and how they negotiated their hopes and expectations within their local context. The chapter highlights the forms of cultural and social resource which were available to Chris and Vince, exploring how each of them drew upon such capital to inform their future decision-making.

In the latter half of each of the chapter's sections, findings from interviews conducted with members of Chris and Vince's social network are discussed. Through an exploration of the experiences of key individuals within Chris and Vince's social networks, a picture begins to develop of how the core participants' future expectations may have been shaped by the experiences of those individuals who were their most trusted advisors.

5.1 Chris

The passage below presents findings from two semi-structured interviews which were conducted with Chris over a five-month period. My first interview with Chris took place in May 2018, shortly after he had completed his year 10 work experience. The second took place in September 2018, just after Chris had entered into his final year at the school. At the time of the interviews, it was Chris' intention to leave the school at the first available opportunity, continuing his education elsewhere.

Over the two interviews, Chris spoke about his relationship with WMHS, the advice he had received about his future in work and education, his fears about exams and becoming 'stuck' in a job that he would not enjoy. Through these discussions, a picture started to develop of the role that the resources which Chris had at his disposal played in shaping his future intentions, privileging certain trajectories over others within his *horizons for action.*

5.1.1 Fitting in

> *Primary, well all the way throughout my school I've been bullied a bit. A decent bit I'd say.*
>
> *So I was sitting there messing with my computer and I unlocked it, so he slammed my computer down, of course on my fingers. Because I was already annoyed as it was, all it took was that pain and I just snapped, and I lost my temper. But yeah it's literally just the fact that everybody gives me hell would be the one thing I'd change*

During the time that I spent with Chris, he reflected that contending with instances of harassment by his peers has been an ever-present feature within his experiences of schooling. The harmful effects of bully discourses, and the pathologisation of bullied students' 'identities leading to feelings of *'anxiety, defensiveness, guilt and residual feelings of failure'* (Ringrose and Renold, 2010, p.590) has been documented within academic exploration of the issue. It has also been noted that, within a neoliberal educational economy based around individualised success and failure (Lucey and Reay, 2002), the responsibility for 'failures' of behaviour that contradict class and gender norms within an educational context are placed upon the individual.

Chris expressed that such treatment at the hands of others had impacted upon his intentions for his future post-16 education. Although such instances were less acute for Chris during the period that I spent with him than they were during his younger years, Chris' studious nature, dislike of sport and keen interest in computers led to him being consistently targeted by bullies:

> *Can't wait to get out of there. Truly honest with you. I cannot wait to get out of there. But as I've been told 472,000 times, I probably will end up missing the days I've been at school. But at the same time if I get a job that I enjoy, that I want to do, I shouldn't want to miss it. I shouldn't have to. I shouldn't have to want to go back*

The torrid time that Chris had experienced during his time in compulsory education left him disinclined to continue his study at the school's Sixth Form, even though his predicted grades were such that he could gain admission should he have wished to.

Instead, the options present within Chris' *horizons for action* involved continuing in education at alternative providers outside of the confines of WMHS.

Undertaking apprenticeships and qualifications at other local institutions after the completion of their GCSEs was a common choice amongst the school's students, with 64% of the year 11 cohort following such pathways in 2018 (appendix 3). However, as discussed in the analysis of the interviews with staff, often such a choice misaligned with practices deployed to 'raise aspiration' within the institution, privileging middle-class educational trajectories and geographic mobility as the most desirable outcome:

> *fact is that these sessions have helped. Cause yeah it's like a one on one thing. But it's given me the one on one time I've needed, because you don't get much one on one time here. It's rarely ever unless you've done summat*

Chris' reflections on both his relationships with other students and his intentions to leave the school as soon as he was able suggest a tension between his own future intentions and those legitimated by staff within the institution. Firstly, his studious nature and lack of interest in traditionally masculine pastimes, such as sport (Connell, 2008; Laberge and Albert, 1999), put him at odds with hobbies and interests deemed desirable by many of his working-class peers. Secondly, because his future intentions lay outside of a trajectory which included participation in Sixth Form and study at A-Level, there was a conflict between his future intentions and those perceived to be most worthwhile by some staff at the institution.

An amalgamation of such experiences, at times, left Chris feeling as though he didn't fit into the accepted social and academic practices of either his peers, or staff at the school. As a result, Chris reflected that it was rare that staff would find time to work with him individually, believing it to be unusual unless you had 'done summat'.

5.1.2 Hopes and expectations

> *I remember in year 6 when I first started them, I was terrible because it wasn't the fact I was stressed, it was the fact I was scared, because I'd grew up in that school not wanting to screw it up. It got to the day and I was kinda worried because I didn't want to screw it up. I was in tears and everything*

I haven't really made plans for that either. I know of. See because I was tempted around the time before my GCSEs I was gunna phone up like Asbone IT and see if I could get an apprenticeship there, before I get my GCSEs and stuff. But I need, I honestly just don't know what to do

A fear of failure in examinations has been a constant companion within Chris' time in compulsory education. Similar to the findings of Reay and William's research with working-class primary school students (1999), the perceived consequences of 'screwing up' led to such high levels of anxiety prior to his examinations, that Chris recalled being in tears on the first day of his year 6 SAT tests. Examples of such an introspective personalisation of failure have been a common feature amongst research with working-class students in education (Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013).

In the lead up to his GCSE examinations, Chris framed his ability to make decisions about the future as entirely contingent on avoiding failure, a possibility which he expressed a high level of concern about. Due in part to such concerns, Chris was reticent to engage in activity to develop strong dispositions toward a particular educational goal after his GCSEs due to the risk (Francis, 2006) of harmful psychological consequences should he fail.

AB

Okay. Ten years-time. You're doing your dream job. What will you be doing?

Chris

Either working at Asbone IT, youtube, or probably like a pages designer or something.

AB

What was your first one?

Chris

At the place I had my work experience at Asbone IT, so work on all the different computers and stuff and all of the software

Yeah like I'm thinking if I'm going to get an apprenticeship hopefully I can get my grades high enough. If I do go and get an apprenticeship and go to

> *college, I might go down and try and do where I got my work experience, I might try and go down there and try and get it because I know them*

Although, as described above, Chris was tentative about making a firm commitment to a particular educational trajectory after completing his GCSEs, there were options that featured weakly within his *horizon for action*. Chris' career aspirations were high, with work for YouTube and international media companies featuring within his discourse as possible future destinations.

What was missing however, as outlined by St Clair, Kintrea and Houston (2013), was a mechanism by which he could make such aspirations concrete and attainable. For Chris, the aspiration of working for YouTube may require the development of cultural and social capitals which, it could be argued, given his position as a working-class student in a working-class area of the Black Country, were less readily available than they would be for his more privileged middle-class counterparts. Drawing upon the resources available to him within the local area, for his year 10 work experience Chris arranged to spend a week working at a local computer shop which was a short walk from his house. During the interview, Chris spoke of his intention to visit the shop closer to the time of his GCSEs to ask about the possibility of securing an apprenticeship or paid work:

> *Kind of worried because I don't want to be coming out of here and be stuck. Like with an apprenticeship I don't wana do, or that wouldn't help me. But at the same time I'm not worried about it because if I am stuck with an apprenticeship I don't wana do then I can do with that apprenticeship for the two years or so*

When speaking about the future immediately following his exams, Chris expressed a concern that he would be stuck. A possibility which he felt was becoming increasingly likely. Contending with the risk of having to follow an undesirable educational pathway after ending his time at the institution meant that Chris, within his dialogue, had already started to reconcile his possible entry into a course that he did not particularly want to do as acceptable. By articulating such a trajectory as a temporary measure, it was afforded enough credibility as an option to feature within his *horizons for action.* The risk of being 'stuck' in an undesirable occupation as a result of educational decision-

making has been discussed previously in research examining the future intentions of working-class students (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). However, whilst for participants in the research, engagement in educational activity to build social and cultural capital was a means in which to mitigate a risk of being stuck, for Chris, his fear of failure in exams afforded him no such respite.

In Chris' case he was attempting to navigate a double bind of risk. The first involved the threat of failure in his GCSE examinations which, within the neoliberal economy of education responsibility for, and the consequences of, were placed on his shoulders (Hoskins and Barker, 2016; Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013). The weight of such a responsibility for Chris, meant that he could not strongly constitute a trajectory within his *horizons for action that* depended on academic success due to a fear that failure would make such goals unattainable.

The other was a risk of becoming 'stuck' in a trajectory toward an area of future employment which he found undesirable. However, due to the position in which he found himself, such a possibility, it could be argued, featured more strongly on Chris' *horizons for action*. As a result, Chris was already beginning to reconcile such a pathway as acceptable, framing it as a short-term fix.

5.1.3 Being stuck

> *My mom came here, my dad come here, most my cousins come here. So it was like that's one of the main reasons that I wanted to come here because my family come here*
>
> *Like my dad when he left. He didn't get a choice what he wanted to do. My grandad says come on, you've got an apprenticeship and you're coming with me first thing in the morning*

Chris' family members have an intergenerational connection to WMHS. His mother, father and cousins all attended the institution. It has been noted among researchers interested in class-based inequality that locally embedded social networks, and the lack of cultural, social and economic capital within them, can act as means for the reproduction of inequality (MacDonald *et al.,* 2005). In Chris' case, the ties of his immediate social network to the locality meant that WMHS acted as the only available mechanism from which to draw institutionalized forms of cultural capital.

Chris reflected that, after leaving school, his father followed a route into employment which was determined by his grandfather and that he had little choice in the apprenticeship which he ended up undertaking. During the interview, Chris framed the route taken by his father which, as expressed by Mr D's father, Tom, was common among working-class students entering into employment for the first time, as undesirable. For Chris, a route into employment that was determined by a family member rather than himself was a means by which he could become 'stuck' in a career which he did not want:

> *My mom says you've got to knuckle down, you've got to get it done because we want you to have brilliant GCSEs so you're not stuck like us*

> *I don't tend to mention it very often because I think ok it's my thing, I wana try and do it on my own. Yeah I know I'll need help at some point obviously but I've had a thought with it. It's like I've got a plan, I'll hopefully make a plan and try to stick to it as best I can*

Interestingly, through his reflections on his mother's discourse, Chris articulated that she feared him becoming 'stuck' within the structural conditions which had limited the opportunities of his immediate social network. Similar to Archer and Yamashita's (2003) research, Chris' comment suggested that both himself and his mother had a tacit understanding of the risk that their class position posed to his future security and happiness.

Similar to Mr D's mother, Karen, Chris' mother bought into the *doxic aspiration* of the neoliberal field of secondary education, believing that securing institutionalized cultural capital in the form of good grades in his GCSEs could be a mechanism whereby Chris would minimise the risk of becoming stuck. However, when it came to planning for possible futures in work and education, Chris articulated that he felt the responsibility for his successful transition fell on to his shoulders. In framing his future success as an individualised responsibility, one in which Ball et al. (2013) would argue that working-class students may blame themselves rather than structural inequalities for not achieving, Chris ran the risk of harmful consequences to his self-esteem should things not go as planned:

> *I still don't know what I want to do because that's the argument we had when I was doing my work experience. Because I didn't know what I wanted*

to do and my mom knew exactly what she wanted to do. So she was having a go at me because I day know what I wanted to do

In the interview Chris reflected that, although he was uncertain about the route that he would take in education immediately following his GCSEs, he did not often speak to his family members about it. Chris spoke of his reticence to engage in conversations with his mother about possible options for the future due to the differences in their educational experience. Chris was of the opinion that, because his mother had immediately entered into employment after leaving school, she had difficulty empathising with Chris' trepidation about his future.

As neither Chris' mother nor any of his immediate family members had participated in HE, they did not have access to the forms of social and cultural capital which could facilitate advice in alignment with the school's practices to raise aspiration. As outlined by research into the interventions made by middle-class parents in the schooling of their offspring (Crozier *et al*., 2008; Ball, 2003), the ability of parents to mobilise relevant capital to enhance their child's chances of academic success is an important mechanism whereby educational advantage is accrued and reproduced. In the case of Chris' family, the forms of capital which they had at their disposal, due to their experiences, did not align to HE participation; a trajectory which, as outlined in interviews with staff, was favoured by the school.

AB

Is there a person who you have in mind that you would most like to be like, say in ten years' time when you're 27 or 27?

Chris

What from school? Or just in general?

AB

Well let's do both

Chris

So from school, nobody if I'll be truly honest with you. Outside no one really but there's like, there's certain people I admire for what they've done. Like some of the game companies, like heads of departments and that, but then some are bands and stuff like that

When I posed a question relating to the people in his life that Chris may aspire to be like, he provided abstract examples of heads of department in computer games corporations. For Chris, there was no one within his immediate sphere of influence (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014) who could provide access to the forms of capital necessary for him to constitute HE within his *horizons for action,* and begin to scaffold his hopes and ambitions with the necessary experiences for them to develop into expectations (Harrison and Waller, 2018)*:*

> *I don't know. Probably Wulfrun because one of my mates goes there, well a couple of them actually. But by the time I get there they'll be in their last year, so at least I'll be there with a lot I know*

Although, as discussed, Chris felt that his pathway within education was entirely dependent on success in exams, in the interview he mentioned the possibility of attending a college of Further Education. Chris' access to 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998) about the institution and it's practices through his mates meant that, although he currently knew little about Wulfrun College, it was an establishment which he could gain informal information about through conversations with his peers.

5.2 Judy and Margret

Both Chris' mother, Judy, and his grandmother, Margret, lived with Chris in a house located a ten minute walk from the gates of WMHS. In the next section, an analysis will be conducted of an interview with Judy and Margret which took place in their family home. During the interview with Judy and Margret, their experiences in education and work, their hopes for Chris' future and how they felt that the school supported Chris with his studies, were discussed.

5.2.1 Local education and work

> *when he passed my sister was 19, my other sister was 18 and I was 8 so it was like, none of us was old enough to really take over the business so…. But yeah we'd have all been working for him if he'd have been here now (Judy)*

> *They wanted to do the same, but being girls it wasn't. They did go with him, but it was a bit harder being girls than it would have been boys (Margret)*

Judy and Margret spoke of the impact that the loss of Judy's father had on their expectations for future employment. Prior to his death, when Judy was eight years old, her father was successful businessman.

Due to financial pressure at the time of his passing, Margret was forced to sell the family business, an engineering company, which Judy's father owned. With the loss of Judy's father came the loss of the main mechanism by which the family built and maintained social and economic capital. At the time of his passing 32 years ago, due to the gendered expectations of 'suitable' employment for men and women (Skeggs, 1997, Willis, 1977), Margret did not believe female members of the family running the engineering business was possible. As a result, the company was sold. Judy reflected that, if the business had remained within the family, it would have been likely that herself and her sisters would have taken advantage of the source of economic and social capital available and secured roles within the company:

> *And pretty much the same as with Chris, I'm terrible at exams so I didn't do too good at it. So I went back and I did an NVQ in Business, an intermediate, and then I did an advanced. So I got GCSEs and A-Levels in Business Studies. But yeah I was 19 when I left for my sins (Judy)*

Similar to Chris, Judy reflected that she found examinations to be a difficult form of assessment when she was at school and struggled to do well. After failing to achieve the grades that she wanted in her GCSEs, rather than leaving the school and obtaining paid employment, Judy remained at the school to study a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) with GCSE equivalency in Business. After successfully securing the intermediate qualification, Judy then moved on to the NVQ advanced program, remaining at the school for an additional two years and eventually leaving full time education at the age of 19.

Interestingly, during my time with Chris and his family, it was only on this occasion that Judy's advanced qualification was referred to as an NVQ rather than an A-Level. Although it may be that Judy chose to refer to her qualification as an A-Level because they are more common, it could also be argued that, through her choice of language, Judy preferred to frame her academic accomplishments as aligned with the *doxic aspiration* of academic credentialization in line with middle-class educational trajectories. As discussed in a recent article for The Guardian newspaper by Mike

Savage regarding a perceived snobbery by Higher Education Providers to vocational qualifications (Savage, 2018), the framing of Judy's advanced qualification as an A-Level, it could be argued, was perceived as a more valued form of institutionalized cultural capital than her NVQ:

> *I think we had a careers teacher, but I don't remember speaking to them about anything. I don't ever remember having any advice about leaving school or what I was gonna do and, you know I think I stayed on because there was nothing. (Judy)*

> *It was pretty much my sister pushing me into that kind of thing but I love it. I mean now even after leaving work to look after my mom I've got my own business. It's doing pretty much the same thing. You know so it's…. I always knew what I wanted to do (Judy)*

During her time at school, Judy indicated that she did not receive formal advice and guidance through the institution's careers advisor. Instead, Judy stayed on at school to undertake additional qualifications because she felt that her opportunities to enter into work, at a time where the local area was going through a rapid process of de-industrialisation and job losses (Willis, 1988), were limited.

While undertaking her advanced NVQ qualification, Judy's sister facilitated an opportunity for her to gain work experience in the reprographics department of a local education centre which was a short walk from her house. This first experience of work for Judy acted as a catalyst, cementing work in the reprographics department as a possible career trajectory within her *horizons for action,* and providing access to the forms of capital necessary to focus on her search for employment upon leaving school in a specific direction. After completing her advanced NVQ with WMHS, Judy secured a job in the reprographics department of the local council offices and remained in employment there until her mother became ill.

Due to Margret's deteriorating health, Judy was forced to leave her full-time employment to assume responsibility for her care. The interruption of Judy's career to undertake such a responsibility impacted upon the family's access to social and economic capital through the necessity of circumstance; a circumstance inherent within a set of structural conditions which have historically aligned all too often to restrict agency and limit opportunity amongst working-class women (Skeggs.1997).

Although Judy stated that she now had her own business making greetings cards, following the interview she admitted that it was more of a hobby, with the majority of her time being spent caring for her mother:

> *Not for me really because it was in the middle of town. Though I suppose the education centre did. Suppose that being so close to home, it was walking distance. If I hadn't have gone to West Midlands High, I wouldn't have known about the education centre you know. But that's not there no more so….. (Judy)*

Reflecting on the impact that the local area had on her future career options, Judy believed that her location in WMV had limited significance with regard to the employment opportunities available to her. She explained that, because she had secured a full-time job at the local council offices which were four miles away from her house, the role that locality played in her decision-making was minimal. When talking about opportunities which were available locally, both Judy and her mother conceptualised 'local' as within immediate walking distance from their home. Although the centre of town where Judy worked was only four miles away, as the family didn't have access to a car, the bus journey took approximately 35 minutes and was therefore not framed as local.

Although the restriction of access to forms of capital that spatial immobility engenders amongst working-class communities has been the topic of research amongst academics interested in education and class-based inequality (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Major and Machin, 2018; Finn, 2017; Taylor, 2016), due to Judy's framing of what she perceived to be local, she demonstrated a restricted awareness of the opportunities which were denied to her through her relative spatial immobility.

The structural conditions which led to Judy conceptualising her mobility in such a manner, it could be argued, amalgamated into an act of *symbolic violence* which Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) describe as an act *'to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force'* (p.4). Judy's lack of access to sources of information about options for education and work outside of her immediate familial experience, and restricted mechanisms with which to physically engage in work outside of the local area through her access to

transport, meant that alternative forms of employment to that which were locally available did not enter into her *horizon for action* and, as a result, remained concealed:

> *Not really, I knew what I didn't want to do, and that was listen to symphony concerts. If I could get out of them, I got out of them. I played hockey and I played rounders and I used to do wrong, because my friend was in a lower class than me, a higher class but a lower…. I was A and she was D sort of thing. And I used to go and do their maths for them. The teacher knew, she knew but she never said sort of thing (Margret)*

> *I went straight into a shop and we was still serving then, rations. You know food on the rations and then I got married. I got married and then I went back into a shop until we had kids (Margret)*

Now in her seventies, Chris' grandmother, Margret, attended school shortly after the end of the second world war. Although her school provided the opportunity to accrue middle-class forms of cultural capital through activities such as listening to classical music, similar to findings presented in other working-class communities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977), she positioned engaging in such activities as undesirable. Instead, Margret reminisced that she spent her time playing sports and sneaking into the classrooms of her friends to help with their schoolwork. Following her departure from the school at the age of fifteen, Margret worked in a local shop a short bus journey from her home until she ended her employment to focus on raising the family, a trajectory followed by many working-class women at the time (Crompton, Hantrais and Walters, 1990).

5.2.2 Chris' future

> *I want him to have a career that will last him through his life (Margret)*

> *I want him to do something that he's happy with, if it means he's got to go and stack shelves in Sainsbury's if he's happy that's all I want for him. I would like him to have a career, but more importantly I want him to be happy. His Dad was an electrician and he was sort of threw into, and he wasn't happy, it's not what he wanted to do (Judy)*

Similar to that reflected in the discourse of Mr D's father, Tom, Margret asserted that Chris securing paid work in a career which would last him for his working lifetime as

the most desirable outcome when he left school. For Margret, Chris engaging in a form of employment which would allow him to fulfil the role of 'breadwinner' (Warren, 2007; Donaldson, 1993) was of utmost importance. Prior to deindustrialisation, such trajectories were common amongst working-class males in the local region, with a large proportion of school leavers entering the manufacturing industries and staying there throughout their working lives (Willis, 1988;1977).

However, research suggests (Savage, 2015) that societal shifts in the late 20th and early 21st century toward neoliberal economy driven by a service industry have given rise to a growth in precarious forms of employment amongst society's lowest paid workers. Such a shift means that, within a neoliberal economy, opportunities for men to find secure, well-paid employment upon leaving compulsory education (Kelan, 2008) and continue within such employment throughout their working lives are significantly reduced.

Judy framed creating a climate whereby Chris had the agency to make a decision based on his happiness as the most desirable outcome for his future in education and employment. In her account of the restrictions placed upon Chris' father in choosing his own route into work, she problematised Chris' grandfather's intervention to arrange an apprenticeship for him into a secure, traditionally working-class form of employment. In presenting such a trajectory as an unfavourable outcome for her son, Judy articulated that she would be content with Chris working in a low paid job at a supermarket as long as he was happy doing it.

Interestingly, the *doxic aspiration* of progression to university, and the accruement of capital necessary to facilitate access to HE, did not feature within Margret and Judy's discourse. Although Judy cited aspirations for Chris making a choice, the choice articulated by Judy did not align with the *doxic aspiration* of credentialization within HE and entry into traditionally middle-class professions (Davies and Bansel, 2007). Rather, the choice Judy wanted for her son was a freedom to enter into a type of employment which he would be happy to undertake. For Judy, the central concern for her son was not social mobility, but instead his ability to navigate the structural inequalities inherent in his geographic and social location without sustaining psychological injury as a result:

He's very worried because he keeps on, he's no good at exams. He's not going to pass his exams, he's not going to get his A-Levels or whatever you call them (Margret)

I struggle with exams. My business studies exam I worked so hard and I got ungraded because I'm terrible at exams. My coursework, I got an A in my coursework, but my exams….crap! (Judy)

An area of schooling which Judy and Margret felt posed a significant risk to Chris' psychological wellbeing was his GCSE examinations. Similar to the interview with Chris, both his mother and his grandmother articulated their concerns over the stress that his upcoming GCSEs were putting him under.

In Judy's recollection of failing her business studies exam described in the comment above, she described a lived experience of educational failure similar to that which Chris expressed fears about experiencing. In recent years, research has explored experiences of class and gender-based inequality within the family and how its consequences, in the form of social and educational disadvantage, are reproduced (Jensen, 2018; Gillies, 2006; 2005). It could be argued that, in the case of Chris' family, such disadvantage was reproduced on two fronts. Firstly, the impact of failure in examinations described by Judy damaged her confidence in her own academic ability which, as a result, was transmitted to Chris. Secondly, with Margret and Chris' father leaving education at the earliest available opportunity, there was no experience present within Chris' immediate social network of successfully navigating the mechanisms whereby institutionalised cultural capital, in the form of high GCSE grades, is bestowed.

5.2.3 Support at school

we absolutely loved my teachers, and I loved school. I just you know, I wouldn't have been there until I was 19 if I didn't (Judy)

They've got no discipline. They don't sort of, they don't seem to care like the teacher's that we had. I don't whether that's because they've had everything taken away from them. You can't do this, you can't do that, you can't do the other. Erm and they just seem to, Chris came home the other day and something had happened at school and I said where was the

> *teacher? And he said sitting watching. Erm a few months ago he came home and he had marks on his back, and I said what are those marks? Oh they was throwing 2 pence pieces in class. Well where was the teacher? Sitting there doing nothing.*

Although, similar to data presented in research with working-class students by Reay (2017), Judy had difficulty in obtaining educational credentials through assessment by examination, she nevertheless described her time at school as enjoyable. However, she reflected that Chris' experience was markedly different. Similar to the concerns articulated by Chris earlier in the passage, harassment by his classmates was a source of constant worry for Judy. Whilst within Judy's dialogue there is evidence of her understanding the increased pressure which, as discussed earlier the chapter, staff were under, she nonetheless framed the lack of intervention as a demonstration of a lack of regard by the teacher for the wellbeing of her son.

In Gillies' (2006) research with working-class mothers who were experiencing marginalisation as a result of the inequalities which they experienced, she comments that working-class mothers' involvement in school life were often more orientated toward *'keeping children safe, soothing feelings of failure and low self-worth, and challenging injustice'* (p.292). Such orientations were present throughout the discourse of Judy and Margret in their concern about Chris' anxiety regarding his GCSEs, his personal safety when encountering instances of bullying and, as explored in the passage below, their interventions with the school about perceived injustices:

> *Never liked her. Known her since she was tiny and don't like her, she thinks she's better than she is and she was, the things that she was saying Chris had done, he's done this, he's done that, well Chris would never of done those things because he's not that kind of person (Judy)*

Due to Judy receiving her own education at WMHS, relationships with individual staff members at the school were at times complex. The historical connection of the family to the locality meant that, in some instances, engagement with teachers were enmeshed in a web of interaction that went beyond the 'here and now'. On occasions such as the instance described above, Judy believed that her prior experience provided contextual information which she used to form judgements about incidents involving Chris and members of the teaching staff.

In the particular instance described, Judy knew a teacher who was handling an incident relating to Chris' behaviour from when they both attended the school as students many years before. When reflecting upon the incident, Judy drew on her historical engagement with the individual to form opinions about the situation, adding justification to her belief that Chris was being singled out. One of the reasons which Judy cited for her mistrust of the individual in question was the way in which she conducted herself during their school years. By stating that the teacher thought she was 'better than she was', Judy presented the conduct of the teacher as in opposition to the respectable dispositions of white working-class women detailed in previous research (Clavering, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Skeggs, 1997):

> ***Margret***
>
> *The only thing is Chris, if he has problems, he never tells us. Millie in reception, I think she's my go to (laughs) if I need anything I think it's Mandy I speak to.*
>
> ***Judy***
>
> *Yeah she's lovely bless her. Erm but yeah I think the main thing is reception, because of not having a lot to do with the teachers it's like they're the first person you got to cause they're there. They normally sort everything out for me so yeah, they're really good.*

Instead of approaching members of the school's teaching staff should they have a concern, Margret and Judy asserted that the school's long serving receptionist was often their first port of call. Within their dialogue, their engagement with the school's reception staff was framed in a more positive manner than when reflecting on their experiences with the teachers. Judy cited that she felt one of the main reasons for the reception staff being more accessible to them was because of their perceived separation from the teaching staff. Although Millie, receptionist, worked at the school, she articulated her opinion that she had little to do with the teachers. Therefore, should either Margret or Judy have a problem relating to Chris' schooling, she could be trusted to sort things out. Interestingly, Judy and Margret's perception of Millie's position within the institution was reflected in the discourse of Mrs Pol, the school's careers advisor, earlier in the analysis. Judy and Margret's comments suggest that, for them, a

perceived degree of separation from the institution's teaching staff worked to engender a degree of trust (Fretwell *et al.,* 2018).

5.3 Discussion: The risks of 'success'

Although, during my time with Chris, he cited aspirations for the future that involved working for multinational organisations such as YouTube, an educational trajectory which would facilitate such eventual employment did not feature strongly within his *horizons for action.* Instead, immediate plans for his future in education were tempered by the types of social and cultural capital available to him and a fear of 'screwing up' his exams. In alignment to research conducted with young people in 'disadvantaged' neighbourhoods by Kintrea, St Clair and Houston (2015), Chris' aspirations were high, however the possibility of their realisation was mediated by social, cultural and economic capital which he could accrue and mobilise toward such an end.

Chris' predicted grades were such that there was a good possibility he would meet the requirements to study A-Level qualifications after his GCSEs. As such qualifications are often regarded as synonymous with entry into universities, especially those boasting elite status, Chris and his family placed a high importance on the institutionalised cultural capital good exam results would bestow. However, his concern about failing, and the potential harm it would do to his self-esteem, made committing to a possible future aligned to success in examinations difficult to articulate. Instead, Chris formed future plans against a backdrop of feelings of fear and anxiety about what he perceived as a very real chance of failure. Such difficulty was not a new experience for Chris, who recounted an instance prior to his primary school SATs tests where such anxieties bought him to tears before entering the exam hall.

Previous research has suggested that the construction of future educational engagement as an endeavour toward avoiding failure, rather than achieving success, is an experience which was not unique to Chris' situation (Francis, 2006; Reay and Williams, 1999). For Chris, this fear, combined with the forms of capital at his disposal, served to narrow the opportunities which featured most strongly within his *horizons for action.* As such, there was a disconnect between his hopes of a career in a multinational organisation, and the expectations which he held for his immediate future in education and work.

Chris perceived failure in examinations as a strong possibility and much of his future planning focused around the options available to him should he not achieve his predicted grades. With no experience of middle-class educational trajectories present within Chris' immediate social network, he instead made plans based on the experiences of family members who were close to his age.

A popular trajectory amongst them, and indeed many other young students at WMHS, was embarking upon a vocational qualification at a local college of further education. Although Chris articulated that taking a vocational qualification in which he had little interest was undesirable, he nonetheless saw entry in to such a pathway as increasingly likely given the concerns that he cited about his GCSEs. As this trajectory featured within his *horizons for action* with increasing strength, Chris had begun to position such an outcome as acceptable, framing it as something he could do for a while before moving on to something more aligned to his interests.

Alongside the process of mediation Chris undertook for his future expectations against a perceived risk of academic failure, a tension can also be observed between the negotiation of his future in education and his position within WMHS as white working-class male. A position which, research suggests, has traditionally placed the characteristics of aggression, anti-school attitudes and macho behaviour as forms of normative working-class masculine performance which hold most legitimacy (Martino, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977).

For Chris, although his deviation from such normative working-class behavioural expectations were not directly linked with his future plans, his alternative interests and behaviours put him at odds with those deemed to be acceptable by his peers. Such a subversion from normative displays of working-class masculinity, recent scholarly endeavour has suggested (Ward, 2015; Reay, 2002), is not free from implication. In Chris' case, the implications included a description of how he had been the victim of harassment at the hands of other students.

Alongside the weight of personal responsibility Chris felt in the expectation that he would likely fail to obtain high grades in his GCSEs, it could be argued that such treatment at the hands of his peers served to reinforce feelings of anxiety, guilt and failure (Ringrose and Renold, 2010) within his day-to-day experiences of schooling. Alongside a neoliberal discourse which, research suggests, places responsibility for

academic success squarely on the shoulders of the individual (Reay, 2017), Chris also had to contend with the consequences of an individualised responsibility for 'failures' that contradicted the gender norms of the educational context in which he resided (Lucey and Reay, 2002).

In Chris' case, the damaging consequences that he experienced in deviating from normative working-class masculine expectations served to reinforce the feelings of insecurity he displayed about his chances of succeeding in his exams. As a result, Chris described his intentions to end his time at WMHS as soon he was able, describing a vocational qualification at a local college as that which featured most strongly within his *horizons for action.*

It could be argued that the structural forces which served to perpetuate Chris' feelings of anxiety and failure constituted an act of *symbolic violence*, which served to restrict the chances of Chris undertaking activity which would facilitate his eventual participation in HE. Due to Chris' experiences as a student, he intended to leave the school at the earliest available opportunity, however in doing so he also minimised one of the mechanisms by which he could achieve A-Level qualifications, that of Sixth Form, within his *horizons for action.* Such a decision, taken to protect his emotional and psychological wellbeing, meant that the chances of Chris embarking on a pathway toward the *doxic aspiration* of a middle-class educational trajectory had narrowed significantly.

Within Chris' social network, he identified his mother, Judy, and his grandmother, Margret, as two of his primary sources of advice and guidance. Indeed, within their dialogue about Chris' experience of schooling, Judy and Margret described their efforts to safeguard his wellbeing. Research by Gillies (2006) and Lawler (2000) has suggested that, amongst working-class mothers, the investment of energy into defending their children from psychological and physical harm is a common feature of their engagement with educational institutions. However, Judy and Margret's prioritisation of activity designed to, where possible, keep Chris safe and happy, left little room for activities commonly undertaken by middle-class parents (Reay *et al*., 2007; Ball, 2003) to ensure the odds of academic success fell in his favour.

Both Judy and Margret had lived and worked within the vicinity of WMV since they were young, with their experiences of education and employment taking place within

a ten-mile radius of the family home. During the interview with Margret and Judy, they explained that, within the family's recent history, the loss of Chris' grandfather, and with him the family business, had been a pivotal mechanism whereby their access to the forms of cultural and economic capital on which the family had come to depend had been restricted.

Although Chris' mother enjoyed school, her experiences of exams were, similar to Chris, bound in feelings of anxiety. After failing her GCSEs, Judy stayed on at the institution to undertake a National Vocational Qualification and eventually left WMHS after completing a level three qualification in business aged 19. Chris' grandmother left school at the age of 15 and immediately started working at a local shop. Although, as mentioned previously, Judy and Margret believed that Chris attaining high grades in examinations was instrumental to his future success, Margret and Judy's own educational experience left them with little access to the forms of capital often employed by middle-class parents, as illustrated in research by Ball (2003) and Reay (2017, p.131-154), to boost Chris' chances of exam success.

Having to rely on locally available public transportation meant that the family's geographic mobility was narrowed to locations which were easily accessible by bus. When combined with Judy and Margret's experiences of education, such restricted mobility meant that employing cultural capital in the form of knowledge about opportunities which involved geographic mobility, or about largely middle-class subjects with which Judy and Margret weren't familiar, was near impossible. Because the members of Chris' immediate social network followed educational trajectories which did not mobilise the types of capital which were of symbolic value to those favouring access to more middle-class professions, it was not in their power to bring such capital to bear in guiding Chris' educational or career orientations.

It could be argued that the limitations placed upon the cultural, social and economic resources which Judy and Margret could accrue or mobilise on Chris' behalf constituted another act of *symbolic violence* within the family's educational experience.

As discussed earlier in the thesis (Section 4.2.2), an investment in the *doxic aspiration* of geographic and social mobility through HE participation was encouraged by institutional practices at WMHS as a desirable objective. However, with access to the relevant forms of capital required to achieve such an ambition in sparse supply,

educational aspirations which aligned with a socially mobile trajectory could only feature as a peripheral figure within Chris' *horizons for action*.

When Judy and Margret discussed their hopes for Chris' future there was evidence of a misrecognition (James, 2015) between their intergenerational experiences of education and work, and the opportunities for education and employment currently present within the region. Having been to school in the period immediately following the Second World War, the aspirations of Chris' grandmother for his future aligned to opportunities for employment that would allow him to secure work quickly and become the familial 'bread winner' (Warren, 2007). In voicing her hope that Chris would obtain a secure job that would last him a life time, it could be argued that Margret's hopes for Chris' future in work were a based on experiences of working life within the region which, since the large scale de-industrialisation some 40 years prior (Willis, 1988), were now sparsely available.

Having gone to school in the period immediately following the rapid de-industrialisation which Willis described, Chris' mother Judy's discourse suggested a recognition that securing what could be considered a traditional 'working-class job' which allowed him to adopt a 'breadwinner' position within the family would be difficult. Instead, Judy articulated her wish that Chris could choose to do something that made him happy, even if this involved stacking shelves at the local supermarket.

Such a narrative by Judy constituted a recognition of the pressure placed upon Chris by the burden of structural inequality. A pressure which, alongside her own experience in education and work, restricted the breadth of what Judy constituted as possible for Chris. With limited opportunity present to access forms of capital that would make a trajectory aligned to HE participation possible, Judy's hopes for Chris' future were laced with an undercurrent of resignation toward low-paid employment; one which Judy's discourse suggested she viewed as a more likely outcome.

As highlighted in Kelan's (2008) research, neoliberalism has instigated a shift in the types of work available to working-class young men from stable low-paid employment within industry, to precarious low-paid employment within the service sector. The differing ambitions of Margret and Judy for Chris' future chart the familial knowledge of shifting opportunities for 'working-class jobs' within their experience of living, learning and working in WMV. For Chris, such a shift meant that, whilst both of the

individuals whom he regularly approached for advice and guidance had experience accessing such work, the knowledge held by his grandmother misaligned regional opportunities for education and employment within a contemporary context.

Although Margret and Judy framed Chris' success in his GCSEs as an opportunity for him to not become 'stuck', they did not describe a future for him which aligned to meritocratic discourses of social mobility. Instead, Chris' mother and grandmother cited expectations for Chris' future aligned to the opportunities which the social, cultural and economic resources present within the family could provide. When talking about the future 'choices' Chris could make, both Judy and Margret described options constrained by the structural conditions in which the family operated. Such conditions restricted the chances of Chris accruing and mobilising middle-class forms of capital, establishing the *doxic aspiration* of geographic mobility and access to HE as at best, a peripheral figure within the realms of the possible.

5.4 Vince

Following a similar structure to the interviews with Chris, the passage below presents findings from data collected from two semi-structured interviews with Vince which were conducted five months apart. The first interview took place in May 2018 shortly after completing his year 10 work experience, and the second was conducted in September 2018 shortly after Vince had entered into year 11. At the time of the interview, it was Vince's intention to stay on at the school's sixth form and eventually participate in HE.

During the interviews, we discussed how Vince felt about the learning and teaching at the school, his plans for the future, and the support that he received from members of his family to help him reach his potential. Through such discussions, a picture started to develop of the options which featured most strongly on Vince's *horizons for action,* and how he drew on the resources available to him in order to frame such actions as possible.

5.4.1 The teachers, the school and the education system

> *If they shout at you on the spot it isn't going to change anything, it's just going to encourage you more. Well it wouldn't encourage me, but some*

> *people it might encourage them more. Could embarrass you as well, in front of all of your mates*
>
> *All the other teachers I had have been pretty strict but, say you're messing about or talking, she wouldn't shout at you there on the spot, she'd take you out and talk to you. She wouldn't shout at you in front of the whole class like and embarrass you I spose*

When reflecting on the parts of his schooling which Vince found most difficult to navigate, he did not draw upon his experiences with other students in the same way as Chris who, as discussed above, recounted the difficulty he had in fitting in with his peers. Instead, Vince's discourse focused on the problematic way in which he felt that some of the teachers dealt with disruptive behaviour. Vince reflected that, when the teachers shouted at him or his peers on the spot, often it led to a feeling of embarrassment. For Vince, the fact that such punitive sanctions were often taken in front of the class caused him to feel that he had lost face amongst his classmates. Research has suggested that teacher perceptions of behaviour deemed to be 'acceptable' can be both classed and gendered (Robinson, 1992) and, similar to Soodak (2003), Vince felt that members of the teaching staff who took a more sensitive approach to classroom management developed better relationships with the students:

> *Maybe go down from 30 to about 20 so there's more focus. Less bad behaviour I guess…. Yeah I think that would help a lot but there's not the resources in place to do that is there*
>
> *Cause obviously like private schools, say there's like 5 or 6 in a class, they're obviously gonna get more attention than if there's 36 in a class*

When I asked to reflect on why there were such inconsistencies in how behaviour was managed, rather than recounting specific instances and describing them in detail, Vince talked about the size of his classes. Such a discourse demonstrated an awareness of the pressure that the school was under with regard to the amount of economic capital at its disposal, and the consequences that larger class sizes had on the ability of Vince and his peers to focus on their work.

In selecting class sizes as the subject of discussion, Vince described a problem which, it could be argued given the volume of research conducted into the issue (Betts,

Reuben and Danenberg, 2000; Slavin, 1989), was one which both affected his interpersonal relationships with teachers and was tied to the structure of the wider field of secondary education. In articulating such a position, Vince reflected that his experiences as a learner at WMHS were directly linked to the societal conditions in which the school operated. His later comparison of his own schooling to those of students who attended private schools also suggested that Vince had access to forms of cultural capital which would allow him to benchmark his own experiences against his more privileged counterparts. A further demonstration of such a nuanced view can be found in Vince's description of a cartoon which he had recently seen online *(fig. 5):*

> *The education system is quite bad, and not to say that there shouldn't be compulsory subjects. I think there's an example where there's a picture of all animals and they all get tested climbing a tree. So same thing with this like your testing what 120 students what exist in this school all on the same test. I would say the monkey can climb the tree and do it exceedingly well, but the other 5/6 animals or 50/60 students might do terrible because they don't have the skills or whatever*

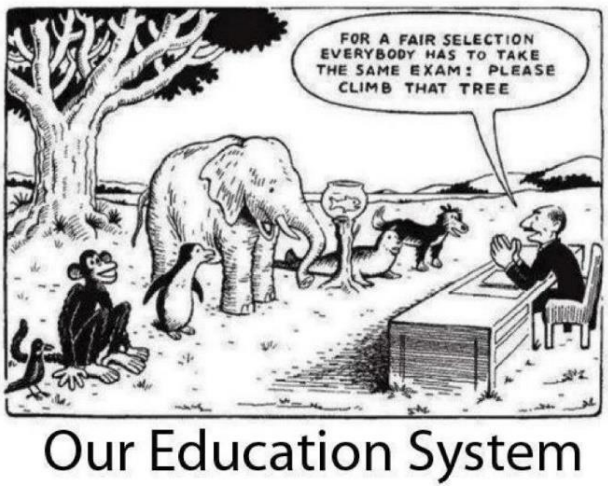


Fig 5.

When reflecting on the cartoon which presented a man giving a diverse group of animals the task of climbing a tree as an examination for selection, Vince articulated the relevance of the image to himself and his peers. He commented that, similar to a goldfish being asked to climb a tree, the way in which academic assessments were

conducted only aligned to the skills of a small proportion of his classmates. It was Vince's contention that the subjects which the students were required to study at the school, and the means by which they were assessed, did not legitimate the forms of cultural capital commonly held by his peers.

Such an absence of middle-class cultural capital in the form of the skills required to succeed both in the study of certain subjects, and later in the mechanism deployed to measure academic success, meant that, for Vince, many of his peers were at a disadvantage. Again, articulating such an insight reflected wider inequalities experienced by working-class students around subject selection and school-based examinations (Abrahams, 2018). Its inclusion within Vince's discourse demonstrated an awareness of the societal forces at play which served to restrict the chances of himself and classmates successfully navigating a trajectory which would lead toward participation in middle-class forms of further and higher education.

5.4.2 Plans and contingencies

> *At the moment I don't feel very confident. I believe the more I push myself to get there, I believe I'll have more confidence and have more believeablility in getting there*

> *You've got to have a back-up haven't you. So there'll always be a back-up in place if I don't make it there. It's a possibility obviously. But I'll go on to the next thing I wanted. If I don't get that I'll go on to the next thing I wanted and then hopefully I get that, because I don't think there's an option D at the moment*

Similar to both the views expressed by Chris and by those presented in wider research with working-class students negotiating educational success (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Reay, 2002), Vince framed the risk of failure as a prominent feature within his thoughts about his future education and work. Although he reflected that, at present, his levels of confidence with regard to his chances of future success were low, he believed that the risk of failure could be minimised through hard work. Although, as discussed above, Vince demonstrated an awareness of the structural conditions in which the institution operated, he still viewed his own performance in examinations as a separate endeavour in line with the meritocratic discourses (Smith and Skrbiš, 2017; Spohrer, 2011) of individualised aspiration and success.

Vince also reflected that, should he not be as successful in his examinations as he hoped he would be, he had invested time in researching contingency plans. Spending time exploring a variety of options available to him based on a range of different outcomes in relation to his academic performance meant that he had begun to broaden his *horizons for action.* Through increasing his knowledge of available options, Vince had taken steps to minimise the risk of obtaining undesirable results to his self-efficacy (Reay and Wiliam, 1999), presenting a range of options as more or less desirable. Interestingly, instead of framing alternatives to his preferred trajectory as undesirable, Vince simply referred to taking up one of his contingency plans as going on to 'the next thing that he wanted to do', suggesting that even if things did not go his way, he still perceived that he had a level of agency in deciding his future educational pathway. Importantly, through undertaking such research, Vince had also begun a process of accruing cultural capital, scaffolding his hopes and ambitions with knowledge that could solidify his intentions, morphing them from abstract aspirations into pathways which he could reasonably expect to follow (Harrison and Waller, 2018; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013):

> *College is a lot of self-motivation. You don't have the teachers backing you, it's like university. I'd say they just give you the task, tell you to go off and research it yourself in the library or something……. Whereas 6th form would be like school, they'd constantly push you and tell you oh you need to do this coursework done, you need that done*

In the interview, Vince reflected on some advice that he had received during his time on a work experience placement at the offices of a local Member of Parliament which had influenced his intention to stay on the school's sixth form. During a conversation with one of the staff members, they had described their own educational trajectory and framed study within a college of Further Education as a much more independent endeavour. The staff member suggested that if he stayed on at the school's sixth form it was likely that he would receive a greater level of support. For Vince, his work experience placement offered the opportunity to access additional forms of social and cultural capital, in the form of guidance, which may not otherwise have been available to him. It is also interesting to note that, within the dialogue, Vince demonstrated a knowledge of the type of independent learning which was an expectation as part of study within HE. Such a demonstration suggests that, alongside access to additional

forms of capital, Vince had already begun a process of accumulating those which held symbolic value (Crozier *et al*., 2008; Ball, 2003) for his eventual progression to an undergraduate degree:

> ***AB***
> *From the conversations that you've had, or the things that you've seen, are many kind of similar to your plans, or thinking kind of a similar route? Or are they thinking very different?*
> ***Vince***
> *I think some of them are just planning to leave the school, go to college, get a job, and then just that's it, where as some of them are more pushing themselves to go to university. But I think it's mainly no university, straight into a job. Get out of here as soon as possible. That's their plan.*
> ***AB***
> *Why do you think that is? Why do you think that you've got these kind of goals and it's different to other people in your year group?*
> ***Vince***
> *Erm I think I look further into the future than they do. They look at short term goals, but I look at long term goals, and where I wana be in 10 years, whilst they look at where they want to be in a couple of years.*

When talking about the steps that he had taken to plan for his future and how it fitted in with the practices undertaken by his peers he reflected that, in his view, he was in relatively unique position. Although Vince articulated that his classmates had started to talk about either going to college and getting a job or participating in HE, for the majority of them, leaving the institution as soon as possible was most prominent within their discourse.

The notion of leaving school at the first available opportunity has been a prominent feature within literature surrounding white working-class boys and the negotiation of their transition into the workplace, firstly with Willis' (1977) 'lads' and their desire to enter into employment at the first available opportunity , and later with Ward's (2015) ethnography of working-class students in the Welsh Valleys. It could be argued that,

through Vince's reflections, he felt that the plans of many of his peers were reminiscent of such findings.

Vince reasoned that, in his view, this was partly to due to the short-term approach that he felt many of his classmates had to their future. In suggesting that he had thought about where he wanted to be in ten years, Vince positioned himself as different in his approach, demonstrating that alongside the breadth of plans and contingencies he had for his future, similar to Mr D, he was starting envisage continuing in education as a means by which to accomplish longer term gaols related to his future employment.

5.4.3 Reaching his potential

> *Loads of my family are always telling me you've got the potential to go far*
>
> *My mom says to me well I'll support you wherever you go in life. If you go to Cambridge, Oxford, Birmingham, wherever you go, or whatever you decide to do. She'll be supporting me.*
>
> *Without that support, you wouldn't have the motivation to carry on, and you might just give up.*

During the interviews, Vince expressed the importance which members of his family placed on success in his GCSEs. Rather than avoiding failure being the dominant narrative, as was the case in Chris' discourse, Vince's family presented the examinations as a way in which Vince could demonstrate his 'potential'. The notion that Vince had high 'potential', he explained, was articulated by a number of his family members. For Vince, such displays of faith in his academic ability provided motivation for him to try hard at school, reinforcing his commitment to do well even when things got difficult. Within Vince's discourse there was a recognition of the pressure (Andrews and Wilding, 2004) he would be under when taking his exams, however through the continued support of those close to him, he felt equipped to successfully navigate the process.

The use of the phrase 'go far' by Vince's family holds particularly interesting connotations about his family members' expectations for Vince's social and geographic mobility which, it could be argued, were in line with the practices deployed by the institution, privileging a middle-class educational trajectory as the most desirable outcome for students upon leaving the institution. With his mother

mentioning elite institutions such as Cambridge, Oxford and Birmingham within her discourse about his future, there was evidence to suggest that attendance at such universities were framed as a possibility for Vince, and as such were starting to feature increasingly strongly on his *horizons for action:*

> *I'd go to my mom first, cause obviously she's very experienced with these things. Then I'd start to go to other family members like my cousins, cause they're very experienced in politics and stuff like that. They could give me a lot more advice on that aspect*
>
> *she was telling me about how I can go around getting a student loan…. Grants they can give you for accommodation and stuff like that and travel and whatever else you need yeah*
>
> *I think she's slightly worried about how I'm going to pay it all back…….*

Although Vince reflected that none of the members of his social network had participated in HE themselves, he still felt as though his family were well positioned to offer advice and guidance about his possible participation through an amalgamation of their experiences. Vince articulated that, although his cousins did not attend university, their involvement in local politics had facilitated access to forms social and cultural capital which, while not gained through study within HE, held symbolic value if mobilised to support his eventual participation. However, there was also evidence within his discourse to suggest that, as evidenced by Calendar and Mason (2017), when researching working-class students' perception of debt, Vince was concerned about how he would finance his studies:

> ***AB***
> *What are you feeling about moving away from home as a possibility? Like for university?*
> ***Vince***
> *Before university?*
> ***AB***
> *No for university*
> ***Vince***

> *Oh, it's an option, but I don't think it's a viable one. I don't know how I'd cope, how I would like pay for the student accommodation or pay for my food every week and stuff like that. I don't know how. I'd have to get like a part time job wouldn't I?*

In my first interview with Vince he spoke a lot about moving away from the West Midlands and, as illustrated in his mother's comment, the possibility of attending an elite university such as Oxford or Cambridge. However, by the time that the follow up interview was conducted some six months later, Vince was starting to reassess the viability of moving away to study. One of the primary reasons for framing staying at home and commuting to university as a strong possibility within his *horizons for action*, Vince reflected, was a pragmatic reasoning with regard to the costs of living that would be incurred.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue that, when making a decision related to future work and education, *'It is the integration of pragmatically rational decision-making within a socially and culturally grounded habitus'* (p.37) that contributes to the strength of an intention toward a particular course of action. Such an integration can be observed in Vince's justification for wanting to stay at home. His negotiation between his desire to participate within HE and the limited economic capital to which he had access combined to make living at home the most feasible option:

> *Erm, that's a good question. It's a difficult one as well. I've never thought of it, personally I've never looked at anyone, as some people say it, as an idol. Erm but it would probably be my cousin Mark, cause he's done a lot of things in his life that are really good. He built his way up from being just a normal person, working family and moved to WMV, and built his way up, all the way up to where he is now. Which I see as really inspirational, how you can get from somewhere. And obviously he's always stuck here, because this is his hometown and he loves WMV, and obviously he's stuck here all the way through from being a CEO, well not being a CEO but high in the ranks of regional transport, to being part of different coach companies, moving over to being in politics, different things. Yeah.*

Toward the end of the second interview I asked Vince if there was a person whom he wanted to be like when he was older. Rather than, as was the case with Chris, providing abstract examples of prominent figures within the media, Vince drew inspiration from a member of his immediate social network. Although Vince stated that he had no desire to work in regional transport like his cousin Mark, he commented that he admired the career trajectory which he had taken. For Vince, the fact that Mark had worked his way up from being a 'normal person' to that of a senior civil servant and community leader provided a tangible framing of social mobility as a possibility.

Interestingly, Vince also used the term 'stuck' to describe his cousin's professional trajectory. However, the term was used in a markedly different context to that described by Chris and his mother previously. For Vince, the fact that Mark, through his career success, had the resources at his disposal to become geographically mobile should he have wished to but instead had 'stuck with' his hometown of WMV and later became a community representative, was something that he admired.

Drawing upon Mark as an example of a figure whom he admired and respected illustrated the existence of an important resource within Vince's immediate sphere of influence (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). As somebody within his immediate social network who, it could be argued, started his life in similar socio-economic conditions to those which are currently experienced by Vince, Mark provided an example of social mobility from which Vince could model his own trajectory. As a prominent figure within the local community, Vince's close relationship with Mark also held the possibility of access to forms of capital which would reinforce his ambition of eventual HE participation. Through the encouragement provided by his family members and the mobilisation of such capitals in support of his future goals, it could be argued that there was evidence of a structure of support developing around Vince, scaffolding his hopes and ambitions with the necessary knowledge and experiences for progression to university to become an expectation (Harrison and Waller, 2018; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013).

5.5 Sarah, Mark and Pauline

The following section presents findings from interviews conducted with Vince's mother, Sarah, and his cousins, Pauline and Mark. The interview with Sarah was conducted at their family home, a short walk from WMHS. When conducting the interview with

Pauline and Mark, I met them at a community centre located in WMV where they regularly engaged in voluntary activity with community groups.

During the interviews, we discussed their experiences of work and school, as well as the possible risks posed to Vince's educational success. Through an exploration of the experiences held by individuals whom Vince identified as his most trusted advisors, a picture begins to develop of their impact upon the formation of his intentions toward academic success and eventual study in HE.

5.5.1 Experiences of education and work

> *I was adopted and brought into Wolverhampton, so I was kept away from a lot. Back then the adoptees, they liked to keep you behind closed doors, you weren't allowed out and everything so the same with the school (Sarah)*

Following the death of Sarah's father when she was young, she was adopted by Vince's grandmother and, as a result, subsequently moved to WMV. During the interview, Sarah remarked that that growing up in such circumstances meant that her childhood was relatively sheltered, consisting of little opportunity to engage in social activity with other children in the local area. Although it is true that, within the interview, Sarah did not disclose experience of foster care, similar to that reported by Stein (2008) who asserts that *'that care leavers as a group are likely to be among the most socially excluded young people in society'* (p.42), she reported that such experiences left her feeling isolated from her peers:

> *I was bullied from day one until I left. So I just wanted to get out and get a job, whatever job I did I just put my mind at it, else I would have gone to college, I would have gone to uni, but the bullyness was that intense I just wanted to get out (Sarah)*

> *Er very nasty. You'd have a board rubber chucked across your head, you'd have to duck in the classes! Specially Mrs Billing, it was the mobiles at the bottom of the garden (Sarah)*

For Sarah, such experiences of social exclusion carried into her time as a student at WMHS, reporting that, in an environment where research has argued that a girls place in the gender order is reinforced through acts of harassment and intimidation (Robinson, 2005), she was a victim of bullying.

Sarah reflected that the instances of bullying, which she regularly experienced, were so acute that it dominated her school life, acting as a catalyst to solidify her intention to leave the institution at the first available opportunity. Within the interview, she also described perceiving teaching staff at the institution with a similar level of threat. As, at the time of Sarah's schooling, corporal punishment was still legal within state schools (Walter, 2016), she described her fear of physical harm from the teaching staff:

> *This is the first chance I've had because I was a carer constantly for Vince's nan until she passed away like 7 years ago. I didn't have any freedom like from then because she was a very, very old fashioned lady so you had to play by the rules. So you wasn't allowed boyfriends home or nothing so (laughs). Even when I had Vince, cuz she'd say er, cause I split up with his father, I wasn't allowed to bring anybody back (Sarah)*

Following her departure from school at the age of 16, Sarah engaged in a number of forms of low-paid work which were available locally, including work on a market and work in a factory, before leaving employment to raise Vince and assume caring responsibility for her elderly adopted mother. Within the interview Sarah described how, similar to her upbringing, her circumstances restricted the level of freedom she experienced. Sarah reflected that, during her time undertaking such duties, strict rules were enforced by her adopted mother regarding her relationships, limiting her access to support with childcare should she be invited to participate in social occasions outside of the immediate family. Spending a number of years in such circumstances also meant that chances for Sarah to accrue new forms of social, cultural and economic capital were limited, with the majority of her time during this period being spent at home:

> *Well for me as a female then, there was no encouragement in education. You left school at 15 and that was it. I don't know anybody that went to university then. And coming back on what Mark was saying when he did, it was all apprenticeships for the lads when they left school (Pauline)*

> *You went into jobs then without the education. I went as a junior cost clark at that time. I didn't need the qualifications at that time because you got it in the workplace (Pauline)*

Similar to Sarah, Vince's cousin, Pauline, reflected that she and Mark did not receive any encouragement with regard to continued participation in education following the time in which they were compulsorily required to attend. At the time, Pauline reflected, such a trajectory was the norm with herself and Mark following vocational routes that, similar to the trajectories of working-class students described by Willis (1977), required little in the way of formal qualifications prior to entry into employment. The experiences that Pauline recounts suggest that, at the time, the only opportunities which were present within their *horizons for action,* and therefore deemed possible, were aligned to working-class professions which, through their schooling, they had the relevant forms of social and cultural capital in which to engage:

> *The education we had really didn't quite matter because my dad always said to me you've been sorted out. My dad had joined us then from Canada. His words were you're always going to be factory fodder, and you're not going to work in a factory (Mark)*

> *I was so embarrassed! Be a jockey?! It'll go around school that I'm going to be a jockey. I don't wana be a jockey! It was dads way of kind of batting back the establishments view (Mark)*

> *I left school. She said have your 2 weeks holiday because you'll work for the rest of your life. And I started on the railway. And my dad worked on the railway as well at that time, and my mom did. (Mark)*

However, within Mark's discourse, there was evidence of resistance to the class-based expectations which heavily influenced the formation of his future expectations. After joining the family slightly later following their immigration from Canada, Mark recounted his father's insistence that Mark did not enter into a job in manufacturing as 'factory fodder'. Following a meeting with a careers' advisor at the school in which his father informed the member of staff that his son was going to be a professional jockey, Marks father made arrangements for him to join his father and mother working on the railway. Similar to the discourse described by Chris' grandmother, Margret, Mark remembered his mother's comment that following such a career path would mean that he had a job for life, again outlining the belief that, in local economy prior to the large scale de-industrialisation of the 1980's (Willis, 1988), remaining with a single employer for the majority of your working life could be a reasonable expectation.

Although the act of resistance by Mark's father described he was bound within the structural conditions inherent within his socio-economic circumstance, his rejection of the possibility of Mark working in a factory nevertheless provided a space in which Mark reflected on the limited access to alternative opportunities for employment dictated by his class position. As a result, he developed a keen interest in politics. In the intervening years, Mark continued his educational development through taking part in training opportunities offered by the trade union of which he was a member, and later worked in regional transport at the local council:

> *I've been a governor on St Owens school for the last 20 years and it has changed quite a lot with cut backs and everything that's going on in education you know. We are really struggling (Pauline)*

> *But I think we both, even though we didn't get it as much as they do now, we both do education, education all the time. Without a shadow of a doubt. We're really strong on that. (Pauline)*

Although neither Mark nor Pauline accumulated the resources necessary to become socially mobile through the accrual of institutionalized forms of cultural capital themselves, within the interview, Pauline articulated feeling strongly about the value that both herself and Mark placed on school-based education within the local area. As part of their continued engagement with the community of WMV Pauline described how she had, for the last twenty years, been a governor of a local school.

The articulation of such experiences suggests that, whilst neither of Vince's cousins benefitted from the accruement of educational credentials themselves, they framed their work to ensure that there were mechanisms for other young people in the local area to do so as an important part of their work within the local community.

5.5.2 Risk at school

> *They sort it out, so I've got to give them their due they do sort it out. Cause Vince was erm tried to extort money from Vince. So it was going up. He owed them a pound and then a fiver because he wouldn't take part in this silly game (Sarah)*

> *I think he was a bit scared to come forward but he does now. He'll say I'm not doing much at school but when I get up there the teachers praise him up (Sarah)*

Although, during my interviews with Vince, he did not recount any instances where he had experienced harassment by his peers, Sarah spoke of an incident whereby other students attempted to extort money from him. When speaking about his peers, Vince focused his discourse on the different approach he took when planning for his future. Sarah, however, expressed concerns that such an approach meant that Vince acted differently to other students in his class, and therefore made him a potential target for bullies. Although Sarah's comments reflect findings suggesting that working-class parents are more likely to intervene to address perceived injustice and threats to the wellbeing of their offspring (Gillies, 2006), Sarah did so in order to ensure that Vince was not being targeted by bullies by engaging in activity to increase his chances of academic success.

Sarah's discourse differed to that of Chris' mother and grandmother discussed earlier in the passage. Whilst they shared similar concerns for the wellbeing of their offspring while in attendance at the school, Sarah had more confidence than that demonstrated by Judy and Margret in the school to resolve issues pertaining to the behaviour of his peers, treating Vince's wellbeing with care:

> *Cause the teachers have said it like. Vince has got it up here and he will but he won't put it out because he's scared of what his friends say and I've told him his friends won't be here in 4 years-time when he's got a decent job and he's at university so.. (Sarah)*

Whilst research has suggested that, in some instances, middle-class educational practices amongst boys at school have successfully been associated with 'coolness', thereby not deviating from the forms of masculinity deemed to be acceptable (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino, 1999), for Sarah, similar to findings by Ingram (2018), Vince's negotiation of activity to become educationally successful was decidedly more complex.

In Shaun's story, a paper authored by Diane Reay (2002) about a young white working-class male student attempting to navigate educational success in an inner city working-class school, it is commented that public displays of engagement with

teaching at the school had the potential for him to be perceived as challenging acceptable masculine practices, therefore risking ostracization by his peers. Within Sarah's dialogue she suggested that, in his schooling, Vince experienced similar risks.

In order to encourage Vince to continue engaging in his schoolwork despite the risks it posed to his status within his peer group, Sarah encouraged Vince to think of the longer-term future in which he would have left his classmates behind. For Sarah, such a future included a successful transition into HE and secure, well paid work:

> *I've been on the school board for the last 20 years and it has changed quite a lot with cut backs and everything that's going on in education you know. We are really struggling. We are quite concerned about the schools (Pauline)*

> *I'm not altogether happy with the schools. Not because of Vince, not because of Vince, I've got a wider remit with people here. People have been concerned about outputs at the high. So I've had to do my bit, and I've been very critical of them (Mark)*

> *There's one part of me that knows Vince goes to the school and that's going to have an effect on him. But you have to do your duty don't you. I'm not over enamoured with the quality of the schools at present on this ward (Mark)*

Whilst Sarah's discourse about WMHS focused on the mobilisation of the resources at her disposal in order to defend against the perceived threat to Vince's wellbeing posed by his peers, his cousins articulated a view which placed the institution within the wider context of schools operating within the local area.

In their role as prominent members of the local community, Mark and Pauline had access to forms of social and cultural capital which allowed them to articulate their perception of the school's practices through a different lens. Such a lens facilitated a dialogue about the school's quality based not on personal experiences, but the measures which they regularly viewed and evaluated school performance against. Previous research has commented that such practices in which to judge school quality are regularly used by middle-class parents in order to position their children to best accrue educational advantage (Reay, Crozier and James, 2011; Ball, 2003). For Mark

and Pauline, access to such information allowed them to compare WMHS against other institutions in the local area and judge its performance accordingly.

However, Mark felt that his position within the community also meant that he was dutybound to make public comment on WMHS's unfavourable OFSTED rating. Mark reflected that, rather than his access to additional forms of cultural and social capital facilitating an advantage for Vince, in this particular instance he was concerned that it would do the opposite, negatively impacting upon his relationship with teachers and his peers.

5.5.3 Mobilising family resources

> *Vince would be in full time work. Don't know where, don't know what country. I'd probably be here still, still working at the hospital, just 10 years older, nearly retirement age (Sarah)*

> *I don't think there's that many opportunities because I've noticed that people like yourself they've got all the graduates, they've got all the PhDs and everything and there aint no jobs for them. Them either underqualified or them too over qualified. So. But erm like he's got good in Pauline and Mark, I think they will help him out in getting further (Sarah)*

When posed with a question about what Sarah expected her life to be like in 10 years' time, she articulated an expectation that her circumstances would be largely the same. Her expectations for Vince, however, were markedly different. Sarah cited the opinion that in 10 years she expected Vince to have moved away from home and be in full time, professional employment. In articulating the possibility that Vince's spatial mobility may transcend local and national boundaries, she expressed aspirations in line with those presented by school practices, and indeed in wider national discourse (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005), presenting aspirations toward spatial mobility as the most legitimate trajectory.

However, similar to research conducted by Archer and Hutchings (2000), Sarah voiced concerns that Vince's goal of eventual study in HE posed a risk to his financial security. Sarah articulated her worry that, in a job market characterised by austerity and individualised competition for roles (Holdsworth, 2017), there was a real danger that Vince would not find secure, well paid work. However, through the mobilisation of

capital by Vince's cousins on his behalf, Sarah believed that such risks to his successful geographic and social mobility could be minimised:

Pauline

And Vince does as well. Because of what we know and the knowledge in different things. We've been very very supportive of Vince trying to push him in the right direction with his education and

Mark

But without being overbearing…

Pauline

Without being yeah, he's still a child isn't he at the end of the day. But the encouragement is really been good for him hasn't it? I mean like…

Mark

We try, I mean…

Pauline

He's got his own opinions, they're very strong now. Well you probably know. He's very strong on his opinions isn't he? We took him last week…

Mark

For the last 4 years, at least 4 years, he's started to come out to help us deliver leaflets. And in those 4 years, not only has he grown, but his mind, his capacity, his thinking ability. Wow. You know it's accelerating at a rate of knots you know. I'm not his dad, I don't try to play the role of his dad. We're relatives, we play the role of relatives. It is different, but we play the role of relatives and friends in that sense. And I know we're influential on his life. And I know we're influential on Sarah's life. God blimey you know.

Pauline

I've got a really close family, but I don't have to be involved in that side of it do I? But with Vince and his mom, they hadn't got anybody like. So we stepped in.

Reflecting on the increased involvement that they had in the lives of Vince and Sarah since the passing of Vince's grandmother several years ago, Pauline articulated the importance that they placed on supporting Vince's educational development. Explaining that such support often involved mobilising forms of social and cultural

capital to provide opportunities for Vince to gain new experiences and build confidence, Pauline and Mark felt as though they were well-placed to help develop Vince's future educational expectations. For Vince, such opportunity included involvement in Mark and Pauline's political activity, supporting them with leafletting which, Mark opined, had paid dividends in his social and cognitive development:

> *in the sense that he's met people that are top of their tree in their given, in the political world and in the industrial world and the likes, that perhaps other people his own age might not have got (Mark)*

> *He'll talk to CEOs and he's 15. He'll talk to them. He won't sit quietly, he will talk to them. I think that is brilliant (Mark)*

Providing an example of a mechanism whereby the social capital of Vince's cousins was deployed to support Vince's development, Mark spoke of a dinner that Vince had been invited to as a thank you for helping Mark and Pauline to during local elections. Mark articulated that Vince's attendance at such a dinner facilitated his first engagement with senior figures within the local community, including business leaders and politicians.

When reflecting on the experience, Mark believed that the opportunity he had provided for Vince would not be easily available to other individuals of his age within the locality. In describing the dinner, Mark provided an explicit example of an instance in which he had mobilised his social capital to provide a means by which Vince could grow his social network, becoming accustomed to environments which could be considered to be commonly associated with the middle class. Through his regular engagement with individuals in such social circles, Mark reflected on the confidence that Vince had developed. As his familiarity with such social engagements grew, Mark explained that he was becoming an increasingly confident and vocal participant.

As highlighted in the research of Ball, Reay and David (2002), for many working-class students, entry into traditionally middle-class forms of education is a 'contingent choice', sitting outside the lived experience of the familial network and requiring access to new forms of capital which are not commonly available within the context of their lived experience. Within Mark and Pauline's dialogue there is evidence to suggest that, through their efforts to support him, Vince had a mechanism to accrue such capitals

and begin to solidify more middle-class educational trajectories within his *horizons for action.*

However, Mark and Pauline also believed that without their mobilisation of such capital on Vince's behalf, Sarah and Vince would have been left with very few means in which to access or mobilise such resources in alignment with the goal of eventual participation in HE.

5.6 Discussion: Higher Education as a contingently possible

At first glance it may appear that the conditions in which Chris and Vince could access, accrue and mobilise forms of capital which held legitimacy toward a middle-class educational trajectory would be broadly similar. They both lived within walking distance of WMHS, their mothers both went to the school themselves, they had largely similar predicted grades for their GCSE examinations, and they were both from families containing individuals who had no prior experience of participation in HE. However, the interviews conducted with Vince and the members of his immediate social network paint a markedly different picture to that of Chris with regard to the expectations which Vince held for his future in education and work.

Within the interviews, when Vince spoke of his educational experience, there was evidence of access to forms of cultural capital which allowed him to articulate his educational experience from a different perspective to that offered by Chris. Instead of focusing on interpersonal relationships and the feelings associated with success or failure, often Vince described how his experience was impacted by wider systemic issues within education more broadly. Interpreting his experiences in such a way provided an initial suggestion that Vince was able to access alternative forms of capital. Capital which, in Vince's case, facilitated the formation and articulation of opinions which reached beyond those which were formulated by Chris, or indeed many of his working-class peers.

Aside from a broader conceptualisation of his experiences of schooling, Vince's articulation of the importance he placed upon success in examinations also suggested access to additional forms of capital. Such capital allowed him to position his GCSE performance as a necessary part of achieving his longer-term goals. Chris' fear and anxiety permeated his discourse about becoming educationally successful, providing an obstacle to the framing of certain pathways within his *horizons for action* which

involved exam success. Whilst, due in part to the forms of capital to which he had access, Vince believed that with hard work he could achieve good grades and 'go far' both educationally and professionally.

Such a belief in his ability to 'go far', Vince reflected, was reinforced by members of his family who regularly spoke of his potential. Such encouragement, he believed, gave him a level of confidence in his academic ability and motivated him to work hard. However, Vince still framed failure in his GCSEs as a risk. In order to mitigate such a risk, Vince spoke of the contingency plans he had started to put in place for such an eventuality. Similar to Chris, Vince framed following an educational pathway which consisted of a 'back up option' as something which he may have to do.

However, whilst Chris implied that undertaking a vocational qualification was undesirable, Vince framed studying for alternative qualifications which deviated from his original plans simply as a 'different thing that he wanted to do'. Within such a narrative, it could be argued, the possibility of undesirable grades in his examinations appeared to carry less of weight of implication for Vince's self-esteem and his future options than they did for Chris. Whilst Chris regarded his examinations as an exercise in avoiding failure, Vince's dialogue would suggest he conceived them as an opportunity to succeed.

Although Vince articulated a degree of confidence in his ability to become educationally successful and eventually go to university, there was evidence present within his discourse that the family's access to economic capital influenced the type and location of university that he would likely apply to. In their paper on a theory of Careership, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that deliberations about which trajectories feature within an individual's *horizons for action* are made in a pragmatic, relational manner by individuals in conjunction with the resources at their disposal. For Vince, a pragmatic deliberation of the cost of student accommodation against the more disguised benefits of becoming geographically mobile, resulted in him suggesting that staying at home was the preferred option.

Since the raising of tuition fees to £9000 per year in England by the Coalition Government in 2012, perceptions of debt acting as a deterrent to working-class students going to university have received recent attention within scholarly endeavour (Evans and Donnelly, 2018; Callender and Mason, 2017). Whilst for Vince the tuition

fees did not alter his intention to participate within HE, the associated cost inherent within a geographically mobile, residential experience of university meant that such an option featured weakly within his *horizons for action.*

Although Vince was not planning to move away from home to study at university, his discourse nonetheless suggested a much stronger formation of expectations toward his eventual study in HE than that which was displayed by Chris. During the interviews with Vince and his social network, there was evidence of the important role that accessible forms of capital played in shaping Vince's expectations toward such an end.

Similar to that of Chris' family, HE participation did not feature within the educational experience of Vince's immediate social network. However, during the interview with Vince's mother, she confidently framed his future attendance at university as a strong possibility. Whilst she spoke of her worry that, as illustrated in recent research (Holdsworth, 2017), an undergraduate degree was no guarantee of Vince's future financial security, she felt assured that the mobilisation of capital by Vince's cousins would work in tandem with his credentialization to facilitate opportunities which, due to her background, structural inequalities had transpired to deny her.

Whilst being a victim of bullying did not feature within Vince's narrative of his experiences at school as it had with Chris', he nevertheless positioned his approach toward his future in education and work as different from that of many of those within his peer group. As described in Willis' seminal text *Learning to Labour* (1977), and more recently in Ward's (2015) research with young working-class males in the Welsh Valleys, for many working-class students their *horizons for action* are characterised by short term goals linked to their immediate future. Vince reflected that this was the case amongst many of his classmates. However, when it came to his own plans, there was evidence within Vince's dialogue of an investment in practices to gain capital which held value to his eventual participation in HE.

In reconciling a subversion of class and gender-based expectations surrounding his own planned trajectory in education and work, Vince framed the intentions of his classmates which followed toward career pathways aligned with normative working-class masculine expectations as 'other' (Crozier, Burke and Archer, 2016). Vince positioned his dispositions toward his future education and work as distinct from many

of his classmates. Such a distinction, it could be argued, provided Vince with a means by which to conceptualise an educational trajectory which misaligned with that of his peers as possible due to his positioning of himself as different.

However Vince's mother, Sarah, suggested that aligning himself to an educational trajectory in which access to HE would feature was not a risk free endeavour. Although Vince did not recount instances where he had been targeted by his peers for displaying characteristics which subverted those held within normative displays of working-class masculinity himself, his mother described times where such encounters had occurred.

Similar to Margret and Judy, Sarah expended a high proportion of the capital at her disposal to protect Vince from the perceived threat to his wellbeing and future success posed by his peers. As a working-class boy with dispositions orientated toward educational success and eventual HE participation, Sarah expressed a concern that Vince would alienate himself from his classmates and become a target for bullies as a result. Whilst research has suggested that, for middle-class students, it is possible to be 'cool' and engage in practices aligned to educational success (Martino, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), for Vince's mother, his engagement in such activity posed a threat to his wellbeing.

In dialogue reminiscent of *Shaun's Story,* a paper authored by Diane Reay (2002), Sarah described a fear for Vince that his attempts to avoid ostracization by his peers, borne out of a fear that public displays of engagement in his learning would challenge acceptable masculine practices and harm his chances of educational success. In an effort to support the complex negotiation of Vince's identity as a working-class student at the school and his desire to become educationally successful (Ingram, 2018), Sarah encouraged Vince to focus on his longer-term goals and a future in which he would create social and geographic distance between himself and his classmates. For Sarah, such a future involved his eventual participation within HE and his successful embarkation upon a professional career.

During my second interview with Vince, I asked if there was anyone who he wanted to be like when he was older. Instead of selecting the abstract figure of a celebrity, or the famous CEO of a FTSE 100 company, he drew on the example of his cousin, Mark. One of the key aspects which Vince admired, he explained, was that he had 'stuck with' the local area despite gaining forms of social, cultural and economic capital

through work which would have provided him with the option of increased geographic mobility. Mark's commitment to the local area, Vince explained, led to his holding of a respected position within the local community. Interestingly, although Vince cited the financial implications of moving away to study as the reason for wanting to remain local within our interview, his cousin's career path also provided a tangible example of someone who had remained within the locality and experienced a socially mobile trajectory.

Through the position that Vince's cousins, Mark and Pauline, held within the local community, Vince had access to a range of knowledge and experiences which served to begin a gradual process of capital accumulation, equipping him with symbolically valuable devices in which to navigate a middle-class educational trajectory. Within the interview, such experiences included formal dinners in which Vince could become accustomed to conversing with business leaders and local politicians. Opportunities which, Mark reflected, would not have been common amongst his peers. It is also interesting to note that such networks were embedded within the locality. As such, should Vince frame geographic mobility more strongly within his *horizons for action*, access to such networks would become restricted. If Vince wished to gain work experience, or indeed secure a job as university graduate, it could be argued that the social capital available to him within the locality would increase his chances of achieving such an aim.

For Vince and Chris, their geographic location, experiences of schooling and the educational experiences of their family members meant that access to HE was a *contingent choice*. However, for Vince, the mobilisation of middle-class forms of social and cultural capital by his cousins on his behalf provided a means by which an aspiration of university study could be scaffolded with the knowledge and experiences necessary to turn it in to an expectation which featured more strongly within his *horizons for action.*

Whilst for Chris, the weight of his family's intergenerational experience of structural inequality pressed down upon his expectations and posed a constant challenge to psychological wellbeing, those closest to Vince acted as counterbalance to such pressures, boosting his confidence in his academic ability, and providing a mechanism

whereby he could accrue and mobilise capital in alignment with a middle-class educational trajectory.

Chapter 6 - Looking Back: Mr D and 'Making it' into Higher Education

As a current teacher at WMHS, Mr D holds a unique position within the study. Now in his mid-thirties, Mr D attended West Midlands High as a student before progressing to university and eventually returning to the school as a newly qualified teacher.

In the first part of this chapter, findings are discussed from an interview with Mr D, examining his reflections on how he accessed, accrued and mobilised capital to negotiate his expectations for, and his trajectory into, further education and work. The chapter examines the resources that Mr D drew upon which were present within his social network, his accruement of capital through his continued engagement in education, and the role that 'staying local' played within his experiences.

The second half of the chapter engages with interviews with Mr D's mother, father and ex-teacher Mr Jamerson. It explores their experiences of education and work, discussing how their access to different forms of capital shaped their own, and in turn influenced Mr D's expectations for his future study and employment.

6.1.1 Resources present within Mr D's social network

> *So you've got carpenters, erm one of my friends works for an energy supplier in sales, erm one of my friends is an architect but didn't go to university after school, he was put through university by his firm and has achieved, I think it's a HNC he's got. Obviously there were people in my cohort at school that went to university but in terms of my peer group now, and my friends that I see regularly on a week to week basis, I'm literally the only one who went to university out of that group*

Mr D's decision to continue in education, completing his A-Levels and later attending university, was markedly different to the path followed by many of his close friends. After completing their GCSE qualifications most of his peers did not continue in education, instead favouring opportunities to enter into full time work. Although, some years later, he reflected that a couple of his friends have now gained credentials such as Higher National Certificates, they did so through opportunities offered by their places of work.

As the only member of his peer group that went straight into HE after leaving school, Mr D reflected on the process of reconciliation that took place with regard to deferring full time employment and a full-time income:

> *Obviously financially initially when I left school at A-Level, erm financially at that point I wasn't as well off, but in terms of where they are now and where I am now I would say that those roles are reversed dramatically*

Although at the point of leaving school he was wasn't as well off as his peers financially, due to his continued study, his situation slowly changed over time. Mr D now regarded himself as in an economically superior position to most of his friends and has recently brought a large newly built home with his wife who also works within the teaching profession.

Within the interview, Mr D cited his mother as one of the main reasons that he bought into the narrative of deferred gratification (Menon, 1997; Straus, 1962) and continued in education even though it was a pathway which deviated from that of his close friends. He explained that, due to his mother's experiences in schooling, she valued the procurement of academic credentials as a means by which to secure well paid work in the future:

> *Whereas my mom had a little more, more knowledge of it (education). Didn't go to university herself but erm, but went to a girls high school and obviously was exposed to you know, further education a little bit more, and she was the one who erm who sort of guided me.*
>
> *Mr Jamerson was my PE teacher when I was here at school, and he was my main point of contact, so anything I needed to know, I could pop in anytime. Right what degree do I need? Where do you do your coaching qualifications? Can I come and do this? Can I come and help with this? And he was always you know, it was always there for me if I needed it.*

Although she did not attend university herself, Mr D's mother passed her 11+ exams and went to a local Grammar School. Similar to the findings of Potter and Roksa (2013), Mr D felt that his mother attending a Grammar School, where the institutional culture was more aligned to the middle-class trajectory of participation in HE, equipped his mother with cultural capital which she could deploy in the form of advice and

guidance for Mr D. As such, when it came to seeking advice and guidance about his future education from family members, Mr D's mother was his first port of call.

Although Mr D felt that the advice of his mother, especially in the form of encouragement to stay in education, was a large influence on his decision to stay on in education, her inexperience with regard to study in HE meant that Mr D needed to find additional sources of advice and guidance in order to successfully secure a place at university.

During his time at school Mr Jamerson was an accessible source of advice and guidance for Mr D, one which he felt was readily available should he need it. Mr D's relationship with Mr Jamerson provided 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998) and access to additional forms of social and cultural capital. The relationship augmented the value his mother placed on a middle-class educational trajectory with practical guidance about the steps Mr D would need to take in order to realise his future aspirations. Mr D's relationship with Mr Jamerson continued after Mr D left school, with an open dialogue between them later helping Mr D to secure a placement as a teaching assistant.

6.1.2 Accruement of capital through education

> *Well it's a, it's a stage by stage process isn't it you know. Securing my degree, getting the right grades for that. Next challenge was to secure my teacher training, now that in PE is not an easy thing to do. PE is a hugely popular subject and so you really do have to set yourself apart to be able to get on to those post graduate courses. Erm and so you know, I dedicated myself to researching what I would need.*

Continuing to study at a local university after leaving WMHS was a mechanism by which Mr D accrued and developed the social and cultural capital necessary to fulfil his ambition of becoming a teacher. During the interview, Mr D stated that he knew simply relying on the institutionalized cultural capital he obtained, in the form of an undergraduate degree, would not be enough to secure him a spot on a competitive teacher training course. So Mr D strategized ways in which to accrue additional forms of capital, breaking down his end goal of being a teacher into a number of small achievable steps.

In taking this approach, Mr D's ambition of becoming a teacher became more tangible. By conducting thorough research, Mr D formed a detailed plan to secure his end objective and slowly worked toward gaining the skills, knowledge and experience that he would need to achieve his goal:

> *So at that point then I knew if I wanted to be a teacher I needed a degree so I would have to go to university. But it was also the financial aspect as well. So you know we were constantly being told that financially in 5,10,15 years you will be better off compared to someone without a degree so there was those 2 main factors really*
>
> *voluntary work, coaching qualifications, experience, and yeah obviously that, the year here as a teaching assistant really really helped me to secure that teacher training course, erm and again sort of allowed me to decide whether or not this was the right thing for me.*

Similar to the research conducted by Lehmann (2009), for Mr D, credentialization in HE was directly linked to a competitive advantage in the job market. As discussed earlier when referring to the workplace destinations of his peer group, future financial security was prominent in Mr D's mind when considering possibilities for his future in education and work. In order to negate the risks presented by study in HE (Archer and Hutchings, 2000), Mr D aligned his study to the goal of successfully embarking upon a journey toward attaining the credentials required for the teaching profession. Although Mr D bought into the narrative of deferred gratification, he did so strategically, choosing a subject of further study that was closely linked to a single, comparatively well-paid vocation should he successfully obtain the required qualifications and secure employment.

Alongside a level freedom Mr D had not previously experienced, university also offered opportunities for him to gain additional coaching accreditations, and partake in a range of voluntary experiences, allowing him to develop skills and experiences that aligned to his vocational aspirations. It has been argued elsewhere (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016) that the ability of working-class students to undertake such experiences are mediated by a number of structural factors which act as barriers to participation. However, Mr D's circumstances allowed him to engage in a range of extra-curricular activities which

proved instrumental in developing a portfolio of symbolic social and cultural capital to prepare him for his next steps into paid employment.

As well as his voluntary experience, Mr D also worked for a period of time as a teaching assistant prior to making an application for a teacher training course. Securing such an opportunity was facilitated by his access to social capital in the form of Mr Jamerson. The work experience, combined with his academic credentials, equipped Mr D with the necessary social and cultural resources after his degree to successfully obtain a place on a Postgraduate Certificate in Education course. Spending a year working at WMHS also allowed him 'try out' the teaching profession in an institution with which he was familiar, building a bank of experiences in the classroom before making an application to teacher training programmes.

For Mr D, working as a teaching assistant provided an insight into the rigours of the teaching profession, as well as the situations that he could expect to encounter as a staff member within a school. As Mr D's experience took place at an institution which he would later go on to be employed by, it also provided an opportunity to form working relationships with current staff members, potentially contributing to his success in securing employment as a teacher at the school after qualifying.

6.1.3 Staying local

> *So I decided not to stay on campus, decided to commute purely because it was at West Midlands University. If it was elsewhere further out, I would have definitely stopped on campus and secured so form of accommodation, but at the time I just didn't think it was financially worthwhile when I could commute and it would only take sort of half an hour to drive to the campus*
>
> *but I'm still in this area pretty much, obviously apart from coming here to work, pretty much every week. You know parents still live near to the school, that that group of friends that I mentioned to you earlier all live in this area. Every single one of them. Brother lives across the road, erm, you know so so it is, WMV is a massive part of my life, yeah it's a huge part of my life*

Mr D was keen to avoid the extra financial burden attached to living away from home whilst studying at university; a concern widely reflected in literature on social class and

HE participation (Mangan *et al.* 2010; Holsworth, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). As West Midlands University was a short drive away, he made the decision to live at home and commute to the campus. During the interview, Mr D didn't position such a choice as based on a perceived difference in the demographic of students attending, but rather as a pragmatic decision based on the avoidance of debts relating to student accommodation.

Attending a local university also allowed Mr D to maintain a close relationship with his friends and family within WMV. Although friends within his immediate social circle did not enter into HE, Mr D had acquaintances from the local area who also attended university. As the University had a high demographic of students attending who lived in the local area, symbolic forms of embodied cultural capital present within the institution were familiar to Mr D and he reflected that he did not experience any of the psycho-social tensions which can sometimes be felt by working-class students entering into middle-class settings of HE (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). Although Mr D now lives with his wife approximately ten miles from WMV, he still spends a large amount of time in the local area outside of school. During the evenings and at weekends, Mr D spends a good deal of time in WMV seeing his family and catching up with friends, all of whom still live locally. For Mr D, his elements of shared experience with students, and the resultant embodied cultural capital he can deploy in his role as a teacher, provide him with a distinct advantage in building rapport with learners.

> *the students can identify with the way I am, the way I talk, you know my demeanour. They know, you know, they know if you're from here or not, they ent stupid. Erm and that has helped me I think along the way, particularly in the role I'm in you know, dealing with erm behaviour, talking to parents and so on. You know you can sort of relate to that*

As an ex-pupil of the school himself, Mr D knows many of the students' parents personally, which helps him to hold authentic conversations when engaging students and their families in his capacity as a staff member.

6.2 Tom, Karen and Mr Jamerson

In this section, findings are presented from interviews which took place with three members of Mr D's social network. These individuals were identified as important

sources of advice and guidance for Mr D when he was negotiating his future trajectory in education and work. The passage will explore how the experiences of Mr D's father, Tom, his mother, Karen, and his PE teacher, Mr Jamerson, dictated the social and cultural resources which they could draw upon in order to provide advice and guidance about his options post compulsory education.

6.2.1 Accruement of capital through education

> *I never really excelled academic wise other than in PE and Geography, but the rest I had to graft really. Within subjects and a lot of coursework-based elements then, which helped someone like me because when it came to exams I wasn't great (Mr Jamerson)*

> *We had a Mr Thomas in PE who was a role model, you always want to be a role model yourself as you get older to the younger people, but he definitely was. The way he was with the students, and not just like delivering, it was relationships as well, how he got on with the students. And stuff they used to do after school to put themselves out for you (Mr Jamerson)*

Although Mr Jamerson, Mr D's old PE teacher and mentor, didn't perceive himself as naturally endowed with the middle-class dispositions which are commonly associated with educational success (Crozier and Reay, 2011), he reflected that a willingness to work hard, alongside the opportunity undertake coursework-based assessments, provided him with the opportunity to gain the institutionalized cultural capital required for study in HE.

The Head of Sixth Form at the school, Mr Thomas, acted as a mentor for Mr Jamerson, providing an informal source of information and a mechanism by which he could access new forms of social and cultural capital.

Interestingly, as with Mr D, the basis for the development of this relationship was engagement in sporting activity. Sporting prowess has commonly been associated with 'laddish' displays of masculinity which are deemed preferable in certain white working-class communities (Ward, 2015; Jackson and Jackson Jr, 2006; Parker, 1996). It could be argued that, through the development a relationship with a teacher of Physical Education, Mr Jamerson mobilised a means by which he could guard

against the possibly undesirable consequences of displaying an academic interest within his peer group (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), while engaging in activity to procure the capital held as most legitimate for successful progression to university.

After a brief stint working in a factory in Birmingham following graduation from university, Mr Jamerson began employment at WMHS, initially in a pastoral capacity as a teaching assistant:

> *The pay was horrendous but it was, that was irrelevant really and always has been. It was helping the students that were struggling in class to get things and see that light come on. That's more than money, you can't buy things like that (Mr Jamerson)*

Although the pay for the role was relatively low, for Mr Jamerson the experience was immensely rewarding and allowed him to develop the skills that were a prerequisite for a new role at the institution as a learning mentor. Undertaking training in this role equipped Mr Jamerson with the social and cultural capital required to successfully gain a place on a school-based teacher training programme. Similar to Mr D, Mr Jamerson used his connection with WMHS in the form of his role as a teaching assistant and mentor to successfully gain entry into the teaching profession:

> *I went to a girls' school yeah. Which I loved to be honest and the teachers were very, all women again, there was no men teachers in my school at the time. But yeah a lot of respect I think and you listened to them (Karen)*

> *I mean I was going to go on and do A-Levels and I kind of made a thought to go teaching wise but then I never really had any encouragement at home because my dad was, he was an Irishman. He worked away a lot, do you know what I mean? My mom was again just, well she kinda did different jobs but nothing too educational (Karen)*

Having passed her 11+ exams and secured admission to a local grammar school for girls, Mr D's mother, Karen, reflected on an enjoyable experience of secondary school.

After achieving passes in her O level examinations, Karen initially stayed on at the school after the age of 16 to study A-Levels and had considered training to become a

teacher. However, shortly after commencing her studies, Karen left the school to take up a place on an office-based apprenticeship at a local manufacturing company.

When reflecting on the reasons for taking up an apprenticeship, Karen stated that it was partly due to the resources that she had available at home to aid her in decision-making (Brooks, 2003). Because both her mother and father worked in traditionally working-class professions requiring few educational credentials, Karen believed her parents did not have access to the forms of social and cultural capital which held symbolic value in the more middle-class setting of a grammar school:

> *I don't think there was much onus on careers advice then either, was there? There wasn't people coming to schools to advise you (Karen)*

As the school also offered very little in the way of careers provision, she had to rely on the few sources of advice and guidance outside of her immediate familial network. Instead of pursuing her aspirations of becoming a teacher, Karen made what could be considered an *embedded choice* aligning with the capital readily available within her immediate social network (Ball, Reay and David, 2002). Following her departure from Sixth Form, Karen secured an apprenticeship in administration at the office of a local company where she stayed for a period of nine years.

Similar to the evidence presented in literature surrounding gender inequality and the experiences of working-class women (Gillies, 2006; Skeggs, 1997), structural mechanisms engaged to restrict the amount of access Karen had to forms of capital valued within middle-class professions, capital which she would have needed to procure in order to pursue her ambition of becoming a teacher. Whilst the teaching profession featured on her *horizons for action* (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) it did not do so in a position of prominence. As such, Karen made a pragmatic decision to pursue a career trajectory which was more aligned with her familial experience and the normative expectations of the local working-class community.

Although they are both from the local area, the experience of Mr D's father at school was markedly different to Karen's. Tom went to a secondary modern school, spending a large proportion of his time developing the skills required to secure a job in the industrial sector which featured prominently in the local economy at the time:

> *We used to have a block lesson, a full morning 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock and do metalwork and make things and this and that you know. There was no machines, nothing like you guys have today, it was all hands. And I think that's where my hands have come in, you know (Tom)*

> *I'll be perfectly honest, hand on heart, no. Nothing for me really. It was just we stood in the classroom and the teachers says do you want to do woodwork or mach work? And me and my mates just kind of sauntered to the metal side. And I'll be honest, that's how it was. I could of done either (Tom)*

Whilst Tom's time in education allowed him to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to work within the manufacturing industry, he reflected that there were very few opportunities available to access forms of capital which would have facilitated the development of career interests that lay outside of work in the local manufacturing industry.

The choices available within Tom's educational experience were geared, similar to that described by Willis (1977), toward a career in either manufacturing or woodwork. However, he also reflected that, although choice was restricted to a limited set of options for future employment, he felt a sense of security in his expectation of being able to secure regular, full time work immediately after leaving school:

> *But again looking back I would say whatever sort of result you got, you could get a job. You know. Perhaps not achieve what you should have achieved lets say. But there was a job (Tom)*

> *Like we helped, well Karen helped more than me, well I was alright but anyway. You know though I always remember that I was very keen and very steadfast that they all got jobs. Damn I mean you know I knew from my experiences (Tom)*

Tom's dialogue regarding secure, paid work was reflected in his experience. After gaining an apprenticeship immediately after leaving school and qualifying as a press tool maker, Tom held a position at a local company for 33 years before being made redundant in 2005. Following his redundancy, Tom began working in property

maintenance and later used his experiences to articulate the importance of gaining secure work to his children.

Similar to research conducted by Brooks (2004), Tom reflected the majority of advice and guidance about future options with regard to education and employment, especially with Mr D's entry into HE, was provided Karen. However, after his relatively recent experience of redundancy, Tom was keen to ensure that the educational pathways his children followed led to paid, secure employment.

6.2.2 Staying Local

During the interviews, the participants' historic connection to the local area featured prominently within discourse about WMV:

> *I went to a local school, I'm local to the area myself. Lived ……. not too far down the road. Went to primary school there which was ok and progressed to the high school, which is just down there, a stone's throw away (Mr Jamerson)*

Mr Jamerson had a life-long connection to the local area. Although he didn't attend WMHS himself, his secondary school was located approximately one and a half miles away from WMV. As such, Mr Jamerson is deeply familiar with WMV and, similar to Mr D, has access to embodied forms of cultural capital such as his accent, which hold symbolic value amongst the local working-class community.

For Mr Jamerson, sharing elements of similarity within his historical experiences and dispositions, facilitated an unspoken understanding. Such an understanding fostered a level of familiarity and provided a mechanism whereby he felt able to empathise with the experiences of students he taught:

> *That's where my passion lies, and it's just helping the students. Helping the kids that come from the same background as me. You kind of get it because in my family or friends or whatever have gone through similar circumstances or live in similar circumstances, or know people so you get it, and the kids understand that you get it. So that was pretty powerful really. (Mr Jamerson)*

Similar to Mr D, Mr Jamerson still spent a good deal of time in the local area outside of school hours, with a number of his family members still living locally. Having

maintained a strong connection to the local area, contact with students was sometimes maintained, as it was in Mr D's case, after they finished their compulsory education:

> *You see some of them now and they're like late 20's early 30's some of them and they'll come up to you and speak to you intown or wherever they are and it's like you know, you think wow, sometimes it brings a lump to your throat. You think jeez that is really powerful (Mr Jamerson)*

For Mr Jamerson, experiencing evidence of what he perceived to be the tangible difference that he made to lives of young people within WMV was meaningful, in some cases inciting an emotional response. Interestingly, in Mr Jamerson's case, it was not the students who had become geographically mobile and attended middle-class universities who incited such a response, but those students from the local area with which he felt a connection based on shared historical experiences.

Similar to Mr Jamerson, both of Mr D's parents completed their compulsory education within the local area, with Tom later attending college in West Midlands City, approximately five miles from WMV. During the interview with Mr D's parents, Tom spoke of the connection that the staff members at his school with the local community:

> *The other thing again I can remember is we had the teachers stayed where they were. I was taught literally, I was taught by teachers who taught eldest brothers who are 15 years, 16 years difference in age, but they were still at the same school. It's not like that anymore is it (Tom)*
>
> *Again that's the other thing you move about a lot more these days. You had a set of teachers and that was it, they were there for life (Tom)*

As a result of their extended tenure, teachers at the school were well known figures within the local community. Tom spoke of having a level of confidence when he started school that the set of teachers who taught him would remain the same throughout his time in education. This deep-rooted connection that the staff and students had to the local community is something that, due to an increase in geographic mobility, Tom believed, is less pronounced within contemporary educational establishments than it once was.

6.2.3 Resources available within social network

As touched on earlier within the analysis, developing a relationship with a trusted advisor played an important part in shaping Mr Jamerson's future expectations. He explained that the intervention of his Physical Education teacher at instrumental moments throughout the process of educational decision-making encouraged him to maintain a trajectory that would facilitate access to HE. During the interaction described below, Mr Jamerson's teacher sat down with him and convinced him to take a decision which would lead to him procuring institutionalized cultural capital in the form of A-Levels, instead of leaving school and securing paid employment:

> *He kind of pulled me to one side and was like what are you doing? Have a word with yourself. He convinced me, he had to sit me down and talk me through this, and I stayed on at sixth form purely because of him. Purely because of him sitting me down and talking me through it (Mr Jamerson)*

He reflected that, without the guidance of his mentor, he would have been unlikely to continue his studies at the school's Sixth Form. Later in the interview Mr Jamerson cited a second instance, this time when he was completing his A-Levels and in the process of making an application to the Royal Air Force, where an intervention by the same staff member again influenced his decision:

> *again he was like you can always go back to that, just go to university more as like a life skill. Really convincing his words I guess was it's a life study, it's not about just you going to college and getting a degree or whatever, it's all the other things that come with it (Mr Jamerson)*

Running counter to recent research which has foregrounded financial return as a motivating force behind access to HE for working-class students (Lehmann, 2009), it was the opportunity experience a new educational environment and gain independence which appealed to Mr Jamerson. However, it is also worth noting that Mr Jamerson attended university some 25 years ago when the funding structure with regard to tuition fees was markedly different (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2016; Greenaway and Haynes, 2003).

He reasoned that the most effective advice and guidance he had received about his future came from school, but through informal means, or as Ball and Vincent would

define it, sources of 'hot knowledge' (1998). Within the interview, Mr Jamerson made no mention of formalised mechanisms of advice and guidance impacting upon his future orientations. Rather, it was a series of conversations with a trusted mentor about his future options which steered him toward firstly, HE participation, and eventually a job as teacher.

For Karen, Mr D's mother, sources of information about options for continued participation in education were scarce. Unlike Mr Jamerson, neither Tom nor Karen had a close relationship with an individual outside of the immediate familial network who acted as a mentor, so advice and guidance came from either the family, or through more formal channels at school:

> *no influences at home I would say, I mean, as I say, my dad worked away a lot so he was away a lot. My mom kind of, they were from Ireland, they were farmers my family. I was born in Ireland. So they came over with no qualifications at all my mom and my dad (Karen)*

> *Obviously people who I went to school with, I still see would have gone on to do headships or teaching, but you know, still few and far between I would say in this particular area at the time (Karen)*

Both of Karen's parents immigrated to England from Ireland, with a background in farming and no formal qualifications, when she was young. As such, she reflected that they were not in a position, due forms of social and cultural capital to which they had access, to provide advice about middle-class career trajectories to their educationally successful daughter. Although Karen attended a grammar school and a few of her peers went on to become Headteachers of schools, she commented that these instances examples of social mobility into middle-class professions were few and far between.

Instead, it was more likely that the career trajectory after finishing school for her peers would lead to more traditionally working-class professions such as administrative work in offices or factories.

> *I think for women, like Tom said it was either factory work or office work. Or like a couple of my friends later on went into banks and like the clerical work*

> *there. But a lot of people, a lot of people I knew and we knew as friends were in factories*

Examples of the symbolic violence experienced by working-class women, and the means by which structural inequalities are felt through the gendered division of labour, can be found amongst a number of pieces of scholarly research (Roberts, 2017; Skeggs, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). In the case of Karen and her friends, she felt that their experiences were similar, with clear expectations about the type of paid employment which was deemed appropriate within the local community restricting their *horizons for action*.

> *My family has always been engineering based, woodwork and metal. No I didn't look up to anybody or think of something in that respect. It was just purely a chance situation, we just sort of went to the metalwork side*

> *I had to get a job. There was no question you know. To what area I went into I think subconsciously I saw 3 brothers, I had 3 brothers in engineering and one in woodwork in pattern making. So I would have thought subconsciously yeah that was the influence. Friends and schools and that no nothing, nothing from there (Tom)*

For Tom, his entry into employment as a tool presser followed a tradition of the males within his family entering working-class professions in the manufacturing industry. Although Tom described his entry into a career in engineering as the result of a 'chance' situation, it was a decision within the limited options presented to him at the secondary modern institution which he attended.

During the interview, Tom reflected that his decisions were not guided by a figure who acted as a mentor as was the case in the experience of Mr Jamerson, but that the trajectories taken by his siblings, entering into work immediately after compulsory education, were most influential.

The idea that he would not go into full time employment immediately after he left school, for Tom, was unthinkable. As the youngest of seven children, he already had four brothers who had entered into work immediately after leaving school and there was an expectation that he would do the same. The experience of his family, combined

with the capital made available to him through schooling, was instrumental in shaping Tom's *horizon for action* with regard to his future in education employment.

The experiences of Tom and Karen illustrate the role that educational institutions play in the transmission of class-based capital (Potter and Roksa, 2013), and how such mechanisms enacted symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) in the framing of futures which were deemed possible.

In the experiences of both of Tom and Karen, it was a relationship between the cultural and social resources on offer within the school, and that present within their social network, which strengthened their dispositions toward certain types of employment. In Tom's case, the opportunities provided to gain skills and experience at school aligned with the class-based social and cultural capital present within his social network, strengthening his dispositions toward gaining paid employment in the manufacturing industry immediately after leaving school.

However, Karen's experience was different. In attending a grammar school, she was introduced to the possibility of pursuing a more middle-class career trajectory and was provided with a mechanism whereby she could accrue the institutionalized cultural capital necessary to follow such a path. Forms of capital which would be complimentary to such a trajectory, however, misaligned with that present within her social network. Such misalignment meant that whilst, the opportunity to train as a teacher featured within Karen's *horizon for action,* it only ever did so weakly. Instead, Karen left school before completing her A-Levels and secured an office-based apprenticeship at a local firm.

6.3 Discussion: A successful journey?

As discussed in earlier Chapters, Mr D was operating within a markedly different temporal space to the study's two other core participants. As a current teacher at WMHS who had attended the institution himself as a student, Mr D presented a unique opportunity to explore how relevant forms of capital had been accrued and mobilised to support his transition into what could be considered the middle-class profession of teaching. Whilst Chris and Vince were currently negotiating expectations for their future in education and work as students, the interviews with Mr D and his social network provided a means by which to conduct a retrospective investigation. Looking back over decisions which had already been made allowed Mr D space to consider

how he mobilised the resources at his disposal at key 'turning-points' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.41) within his educational career to eventually gain entry in to the teaching profession.

When reflecting on his educational trajectory and eventual participation in HE at a local university, Mr D cited two main mechanisms by which he gained knowledge and experience which held appropriacy for such a destination. An important source of guidance was his mother Karen. Although Karen did not attend university herself, Mr D reflected that her positive experience of attending a Grammar School had provided her with a knowledge of, and a commitment to, education as an undertaking which was valuable and enriching. Such experience meant that, when it came to Mr D's educational decision-making, Karen was knowledgeable and supportive in the guidance that she offered.

Within the school itself, Mr D cited his relationship with Mr Jamerson, one of his PE teachers, as a mechanism by which he could accrue relevant cultural capital in the form of knowledge about participation within HE and entry into the teaching profession. As Mr D described their relationship as one which was largely informal, he had the opportunity to obtain what Ball and Vincent (1998) would describe as *'hot' knowledge* through dialogue and personal recommendations about the best steps to take. Perceiving Mr Jamerson as an accessible form of advice and guidance during his time at school meant that Mr D had consistent access to a source of relevant capital which strongly aligned with his own ambitions of becoming an educator.

In order to achieve his long-term goal of becoming a teacher, Mr D broke down his objective into a series of short-term goals. Taking such an approach engendered a process whereby Mr D strategically and gradually accumulated capital, first while at school, and later while at university, in alignment with his longer-term vocational objectives.

Counter to narratives present amongst some of the teaching staff at the school, and indeed in wider discourse which as Taylor highlights (2016), often positions spatial immobility as problematic, Mr D's route into what could be considered middle-class employment was achieved by accessing and mobilising forms of capital which were available within a 20 mile radius of his home address. Attending a Post-92 university within the locality allowed Mr D to avoid accumulating additional debt through the cost

of accommodation, maintain regular contact with school friends and family members, and study at a university which had a high demographic of students in attendance who Mr D identified with as similar to himself.

Following his departure from WMHS as a student, Mr D mobilised his relationship with the institution as a means by which to access additional teaching experiences and build the capital necessary to successfully enter into the teaching profession.

Similar to Friedman's research which examined the habitus clive or 'cleft habitus' caused by experiences of social mobility (2016), Mr D's slow, gradual accumulation of symbolically valuable capital within the locality allowed him to negate many of the psycho-social risks associated with students who undertake a rapid change of geographic an social setting (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

During the interview, Mr D described a range of benefits which he believed achieving a socially mobile, but not necessarily geographically mobile, trajectory had in his personal and professional life. He reflected that, as a teacher at the school who had similar experiences to the students, and was from the local area himself, he found it easier to build authentic relationships with the students given the legitimacy that his local experiences bestowed upon him within the context of the institution. Staying local also allowed Mr D to maintain strong relationships with family members and childhood friends which, had he become geographically mobile and moved away to university, would have been difficult to achieve.

By strategically and gradually accumulating capital which was of symbolic value to his career intentions within a local context, it could be argued that Mr D achieved what Ingram (2018) describes as a *reconciled habitus*. Through the maintenance of strong ties to his childhood friends, family and local community, whilst at the same time accessing, accruing and mobilising relevant symbolic capital in support of his teaching aspirations, Mr D positioned himself in such a manner that he could *'successfully navigate both fields'* (p.65) and *'accommodate both structures despite opposition'* (p.65). For Mr D, there is evidence to suggest that his experience of social mobility was conjunctive, allowing space for structures linked to his local educational context, alongside those introduced through his study in HE, to become internalised in relative harmony.

However, it is also worthy of reflection that whilst his combination of experiences placed Mr D in a strong position to secure a job as a teacher within his local community and achieve a unique relationship with the students as a result, this may not be the case if Mr D made a decision to become geographically mobile. Should Mr D, for example, take up a new position as a teacher within a more middle-class setting in Oxfordshire, many of the dispositions which he found to be so valuable in building trust and rapport with the students at WMHS, it could be argued, would hold less contextual legitimacy.

With regard to the experiences of Mr D's social network in shaping his future educational and career trajectory, a number of individuals mobilised social and cultural capital accumulated from their own time in education and work. Access to such experiences scaffolded his aspirations, cementing the teaching profession strongly within his *horizons for action*.

As mentioned previously, Karen's experience attending a grammar school endowed her with cultural capital which held value in the encouragement of Mr D to invest energy in a trajectory which featured sustained engagement in education. A pathway which deferred financial gratification and placed legitimacy in participation within HE. Although, during the interview, Karen reflected that the working-class position of her family meant that they did not have access to relevant forms of capital to support her own continued participation in education, she was keen to use her commitment to the value of education in support of Mr D's ambition to become a teacher.

Although her comparatively middle-class educational experiences meant that the teaching profession featured within Karen's own *horizons for action*, she felt that, due to her family circumstances, it only did so weakly. However, as discussed in various pieces of social research (Potter and Roksa, 2013; Ball, 2003; Whitty, 2001,) Karen's experience of schooling in an environment which could be considered more middle-class, equipped her with dispositions such as a recognition of the value of institutionalized forms of cultural capital, which she later mobilised in support of Mr D's efforts to enter in to HE and train as a teacher.

It could be argued that Tom, Mr D's father's, experience was reminiscent of the educational experiences commented upon in Willis' Learning to Labour (1977). At his Secondary Modern School, opportunities to engage in activity in which he could accrue

forms of capital which held symbolic value within middle-class professions simply were not available. As such, Tom felt that his ability to mobilise his own knowledge and experience in support of Mr D's ambition to eventually become a teacher was limited. However Tom described, similar to research by Lehman (2009), his steadfastness that Mr D's continued education was focused toward full-time employment in a profession which would be a secure and reliable form of income.

Similar to the hopes for Chris' future described by his grandmother, Tom's experience of education and work are illustrative of the tensions inherent within intergenerational experiences of education and employment within a de-industrialised working-class community. Within such a community, the opportunity to obtain secure, low paid work in line with the position of the working-class male as 'breadwinner' (Warren, 2007) is limited, instead research has suggested that the jobs that await within such a community, as illustrated by Kelan (2008), are far less secure. However, in the case of Mr D, the risk of entry into such employment was mediated by the forms of capital available within his wider social network. A combination of such experiences meant that Mr D's study within HE was aligned to specific career destination, again providing an example of reconciliation between his working-class background and his comparatively middle-class route in education and work.

Having attended a school a couple of miles down the road from WMHS, the trajectory of Mr Jamerson, Mr D's mentor, into the position of PE teacher at the institution was characterised by engagement with key individuals who acted as conduits of information, advice and guidance about his future in education and work. Access to such forms of capital, in combination with his affinity for the local area, he reflected, instilled within him a personal commitment to provide opportunity for local students with whom he believed he had shared experiences. Such a commitment from Mr Jamerson was mirrored within his practice. For Mr D, it situated Mr Jamerson as an accessible source of information about access to university, and the means by which he could accrue the symbolic capital necessary to successfully secure employment as a teacher.

Mr D's decision to continue in education also represented a deviation from the trajectory of many of his friends who, as he described earlier, followed vocational routes into types of employment more commonly associated with working-class males.

However, within his discourse, there was little evidence of such a subversion of normative working-class expectations posing the level of risk to his wellbeing described in the analysis of the study's other core participants and their respective networks.

A possible reason for Mr D's comparatively unproblematic negotiation of his alternative educational trajectory could be offered by his selection of mentor. As Smith suggests (2007), often practices aligned to normative working-class masculinities *'are primarily pursued as strategic manoeuvres designed to achieve, manage and maintain collective peer group status in the conflict-ridden environment of the co-educational classroom'* (p. 181). Through accruing relevant capital by engagement with Mr Jamerson, a teacher of Physical Education, Mr D hybridised the traditionally masculine pastime of sport with the accumulation of knowledge which, as mentioned previously, posed the risk of damaging Mr D's status within his peer group.

Combining his efforts to accrue capital of symbolic value to participation in HE with engagement in sport, it could be argued, provided Mr D with a mechanism by which he could defend against narratives positioning his behaviour as undesirable and effeminate (Smith, 2007; Martino, 1999), whilst at the same time developing necessary resources to develop study at university strongly within his *horizons for action*.

Possibly another contributing factor to the reconciliation of educational success with his position as a working-class male, came from his familial experience with education. As discussed earlier, the route of Tom, Mr D's father, into education and work was embedded within the normative working-class educational experiences of the local community; an experience which reflected that of his grandfather before him. As such, Mr D had a tacit, unconscious understanding of the practices of masculinity within the local community deemed to hold most legitimacy, holding access to a range of capital which he could draw on to manage and maintain status within his peer group.

The ability of Mr D to successfully reconcile his status as working-class male within the classroom with educational success and HE participation again points to what Ingram (2018) would describe as a *reconciled habitus* in which he was able to accrue and mobilise forms of capital which held symbolic value to HE participation, whilst at the same time maintaining masculine practices which were deemed to be legitimate amongst his peer group.

Given the respective experiences of the members of Mr D's social network, it could be argued that the forms of capital present within his social network to support development of his intentions toward HE were a fortuitous combination of chance and circumstance. In the particular context of Mr D, the educational experience of his mother and the support of figures in his wider social network, such as Mr Jamerson, served to equip him with access to the forms of capital required for entry to university and employment as a teacher, framing an otherwise *contingent choice* strongly within his *horizons for action*.

Although the forms of capital available to Mr D amalgamated to shape and scaffold his expectations toward the specific objective of employment as a PE teacher, such capital was not made available through institutional structures present within his schooling. Rather, such opportunities were made available through social capital in the form of key individuals. Individuals who, similar to the research of Ball (2003) and Reay, Crozier and James (2011) with the middle-classes in education, mobilised their experience to construct a scaffold of tangibility around Mr D's aspirations.

However, the combination of capital mobilised to support Mr D's ambitions were uniquely suited to the particular pathway of becoming a PE teacher. Whilst the middle class may be able to utilise their cultural, social and economic capital in support of their children's ambitions for a number of educational and career trajectories, it could be argued that, if Mr D held hopes of becoming an economist or a doctor, the resources needed to support the acquisition of necessary knowledge, skills and experiences to frame such professions strongly within his *horizons for action* would have been significantly more difficult to come by.

Chapter 7 - Walking the Tightrope

The examination of the interviews conducted with WMHS staff, the core participants and members of their social networks highlight the complex, relational nature of the formation of future intentions in a geographic context where individuals face significant social and economic challenges. Operationalising Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, social and economic capital (1977) alongside the sociological theory of career decision-making presented by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), the study sought to develop further insight into how the core participants drew on available forms of capital to decide what was possible for their future education and work.

Within the analysis, combining data collected from interviews with the core participants, data collected with individuals within their respective social networks, and data collected with members of staff at WMHS, facilitated a rich insight into how such expectations were shaped in relational engagement with the individuals' social, geographic and educational location.

The study also took place against a backdrop of educational policy making which, since the Dearing report of 1997 (Thompson, 2017), has presented widening university access as a key objective. It has been argued within this thesis that a sustained focus on increasing the numbers of students entering HE has fostered a climate whereby such an educational trajectory has become the *doxic aspiration.* Within a context where geographic mobility and HE participation are deemed most legitimate in a *'belief which escapes questioning'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.98), the study sought to explore how the participants accessed, accrued, mobilised and deployed capital in (mis)alignment with such an aspiration.

Alongside a sustained political discourse which has framed university study as the most desirable tool by which to achieve geographic and social mobility, has been one of an aspirational 'deficit' amongst working-class students. In Chapter 1, the validity of such a discourse was challenged, discussing a range of scholarly work which problematised the narrative as one which facilitates and perpetuates a model of individual 'deficit' or 'lack' (Baker, 2016; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013; Spohrer, 2011). Within such a context, there has also been a growing body of evidence to suggest that activity aligned to 'aspiration-raising' is an ineffectual tool by which to

widen university access (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Khattab, 2015; Croll and Attwood, 2013a).

In a recent paper by Harrison and Waller (2018) it was argued that in order to achieve a deeper level of understanding about how individuals make decisions related to their future in education and work, the importance of exploring the formation of expectations, as opposed to aspirations, was key. In alignment with such an assertion, the research examined how the core participants drew on relevant cultural, social and economic capital, allowing them to frame certain trajectories strongly within their *horizons for action*, whilst pragmatically discounting other trajectories for which such capital did not align.

Previous research has suggested that institutional practices play an important role in the development of students' intentions toward particular educational trajectories (Ingram, 2018; Donnelly, 2014; Ingram, 2011; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). In Chapter 4, such findings were reflected. The analysis examined how staff understood the dispositions of the white working-class students and their parents in relation to their locality, how they positioned students' educational success, and investigated their understanding of the white working-class students' educational expectations within their social and geographic context. Following such a discussion, the section moved on to an examination of the practices deployed by WMHS to develop the expectations of the white working-class students.

In Chapters 5 and 6, findings were presented detailing analysis from interviews which took place with the study's three core participants and key individuals within each of their social networks. Through engagement with white working-class males and those individuals whom they considered their most trusted advisers, a picture started to develop of how each of the participants drew upon forms of capital. Capital which held value to certain educational and career trajectories, facilitating a process whereby certain future orientations began to feature in the participants' *horizons for action* with an increasing degree of strength.

As Hodkinson asserts

> *career is always part of unequal and complex relational interactions. Career decision-making is never an exclusively individual act. Within any career field, actions of others, be they employers, managers, admissions tutors,*

> *government agents, Trades Unions, colleagues, family and friends have a significant influence. The ability of any individual to progress is strongly influenced by the resources (economic, cultural and social) at their disposal (Hodkinson, 2008, p.10)*

This chapter uses the understanding developed through the mobilisation of *horizons for action* as a conceptual tool within the analysis of the data. It builds and extends upon such understanding to provide the depiction of a tightrope. Framing the formation of future educational intentions as a precarious journey between an *embedded* and *contingent choice* (Ball, Reay and David, 2002), the findings centralise the importance of risk; risk which is bound to the structural conditions in which the core participants were situated (Dillabough, 2004), and negotiated in a relational dialogue with their social, geographic and temporal location.

7.1 Key Findings

Within this section, the key findings from this research in relation to the study's guiding questions are discussed:

How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?

WMHS deployed practices to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work with two aims. Firstly, activity was conducted in alignment with a wider agenda of 'aspiration-raising', promoting geographic and social mobility through attendance at middle-class HE Providers as the trajectory which held most legitimacy. Secondly, practices were deployed to support the development of students' expectations which aligned with their socio-historic experience of education work within WMV. Often such practices were conflicting, and were at times, paradoxical.

How do white working-class males draw upon the resources available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?

In accessing, accruing and mobilising capital which aligned to their future orientations the core participants walked a tightrope, one which was surrounded by risk. On one side there was a risk of failure and the potential of being singled out by their peers

should they attempt to accrue capital which held value to the *doxic aspiration* of study in HE and geographic mobility. On the other was the risk that not doing so would lead to the reproduction of existing inequality, restricting access to future employment opportunities in which they could be happy and secure.

How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?

For each of the core participants, the forms of social, cultural and economic capital held by those individuals within their social network whom they identified as important sources of advice and guidance played a substantial role in the formation of expectations which (mis)aligned with that of social and geographic mobility. The students' future intentions were shaped by experiences of education and work within WMV; experiences which spanned multiple generations.

Fig.6

Figure 6 provides a depiction of the study's findings. The image presents the process by which the core participants accessed, accrued and mobilised capital to form expectations in (mis)alignment with particular educational and career trajectories in the form of a tightrope. At one end of the tightrope is what Ball, Reay and David (2002) would describe as the *embedded choice*. Within the context of this study, the *embedded choice* constituted social and geographic immobility. Individuals would continue into local education and work, drawing on forms of social and cultural capital which were readily available and aligned to WMV's particular socio-historic context.

At the other end of the tightrope was the *contingent choice,* one which required access, accrual and mobilisation of different forms of capital, lying largely outside of their normative experience and not always readily available. In the context of this study the

contingent choice aligned with fulfilment of the *doxic aspiration;* that of geographic and social mobility facilitated by moving away to study at university.

How far the study's core participants could travel along the tightrope, and indeed whether they could travel along it all, depended on the forms of capital which could be deployed on their behalf to minimise the risk of falling off.

At one end of the tightrope participants faced the risk of undertaking a trajectory which would lead to the reproduction of economic and social inequality present within their familial experiences of education and work. In the accruement of capitals aligned to the *embedded choice,* capitals which were often familiar and easily accessible, participants risked limiting opportunities for employment in which they could be secure and happy.

At the other end they faced the risk of academic failure and alienation by their peer group should they make an investment in the accrual of alternative forms of capital which would allow HE participation and geographic mobility to feature strongly within their *horizons for action.* As such a trajectory also constituted a *contingent choice,* lying outside of their lived experience, the access that core participants had to capital aligning with such an ambition was restricted.

Within the analysis of the data there are multiple examples of tensions and paradoxes which mediated the strength in which certain educational and occupational trajectories were framed within participants' *horizons for action*. Such tensions were present in the practices deployed by WMHS, the strength in which the core participants framed certain trajectories within their *horizons for action,* and within the experiences of their social network.

In each case, the tension and paradox related to a conflict between the forms of social and cultural capital which were held within the socio-historic context of a working-class community, and those which were deemed to be most legitimate in a policy context which framed HE study and geographic mobility as the aspirational objective.

With regard to the practices deployed by WMHS to develop students' future expectations, paradoxical practices were evident. A tension existed between the provision which staff perceived to be best for the students, and that which aligned with a wider policy agenda of aspiration-raising and university participation.

On one hand the staff encouraged students to aspire toward Russell Group universities, being presented with students who had become geographically mobile as examples of success in line with the *doxic aspiration*. Supporting wider research on student aspiration (Spohrer, 2016; Spohrer, 2011) within such a discourse success was framed as an individualised endeavour. Students were encouraged to buy into a meritocratic narrative, presenting a socially mobile educational trajectory as a 'choice'. A choice which was unencumbered by the structural conditions, which research has suggested (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), have a significant effect on the formation of students' career expectations.

On the other hand there was evidence of a reflection that within individual student experiences, such a trajectory was not necessarily the most suitable for each of the white working-class learners; and that school practices which just focused on the most academically successful, may have harmful consequences for students who achieved lower grades. Although it posed significant risk to the school's performance in league tables, students were given the opportunity to take subjects at GCSE which aligned to vocational education and employment.

Within the examination of the process by which the core participants accessed and accrued capital to mobilise in the negotiation of their future expectations, such tension can also be observed. Through the analysis of the discourse of Chris, Vince, Mr D and the members of their social networks, there was evidence of how, in each of their cases, a negotiation of the 'possible' was undertaken within the bounds of their geographic, social and familial circumstance.

For Mr D and Vince, key individuals within their social networks allowed them access to varying degrees of capital which held symbolic value to HE participation, allowing them to frame university study with a degree of strength within their *horizons for action*. However, for Chris and his family the social, cultural and economic capital at their disposal was deeply embedded within intergenerational experiences of spatial immobility and inequality. Such experience meant that there were no means by which Chris could access capital which aligned to his eventual study within HE, and opportunities for their accruement were often misrecognised.

It is also interesting to note that, although it could be argued that Mr D successfully achieved social mobility through his entry into the teaching profession, the journey he

made across the tightrope was short and deliberate. As discussed within the findings, Mr D made choices with regard to his future education and work that facilitated the accrual of capital necessary to qualify as a teacher, whilst at the same time retaining his ties to WMV, his school friends, and his family.

Counter to narratives present amongst some of the teaching staff at the school, and indeed in wider discourse which, as Taylor highlights (2016), often positions spatial immobility as problematic, Mr D's route into what could be considered middle-class employment was achieved by accessing and mobilising forms of capital which were available within a 20 mile radius of his home address. Attending a Post-92 university within the locality allowed Mr D to avoid accumulating additional debt through the cost of accommodation, maintain regular contact with school friends and family members, and study at a university which had a high demographic of students attending from a similar background to himself.

Similar to Friedman's research which examined the habitus clive or a 'cleft habitus' caused by experiences of social mobility (2016), Mr D's slow, gradual accumulation of capital which held a wider degree of symbolic legitimacy within the locality allowed him to negate many of the psycho-social risks associated with students who undertake a rapid change of geographic and social setting (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). However, in doing so it could also be argued that Mr D shortened his journey on the tightrope. By undertaking activity which constituted a partial, pragmatic investment in the *doxic aspiration* of geographic and social mobility, Mr D minimised the risk of psycho-social injury by limiting his distance of travel.

Alongside the tensions examined within the institutional practices of WMHS in the access and accrual of capital by the study's core participants, there was also a tension between normative working-class masculinities widely accepted as legitimate within the institution (Reay, 2002; Martino, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), and the subversive practices necessary for the core participants to align their educational orientations with HE participation and geographic mobility. Whilst Kelan's research (2008) has suggested that the neoliberal economic climate is characterised by precarity for males in the workplace, and other research (Roberts, 2017) has suggested that as result there is increasing evidence of inclusive practices of masculinity, each of the study's

core participants described reconciling their perceived deviation from normative masculine practices with varying degrees of success.

For the study's core participants, a culmination of such tensions meant that in negotiating their future expectations, risk was an ever-present companion. The notion that educational practices which aligned to socially mobile trajectories were perceived as a risky enterprise has been widely commented within scholarly endeavour into the subject (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). The findings present in the analysis suggest that for the core participants, undertaking activity aligned to their eventual entry into HE was layered with uncertainty, requiring significant work to accrue capital which lay outside of the lived experience of both the core participants and those closest to them.

There was evidence within the discourse of Vince and Chris of high aspirations for their future careers, however these were mediated by the risk of engaging in practices associated with their realisation. As mentioned previously, Vince and Chris had broadly similar predicted grades for their upcoming GCSE exams, but their development of expectations regarding an educational future which they deemed 'possible', was markedly different.

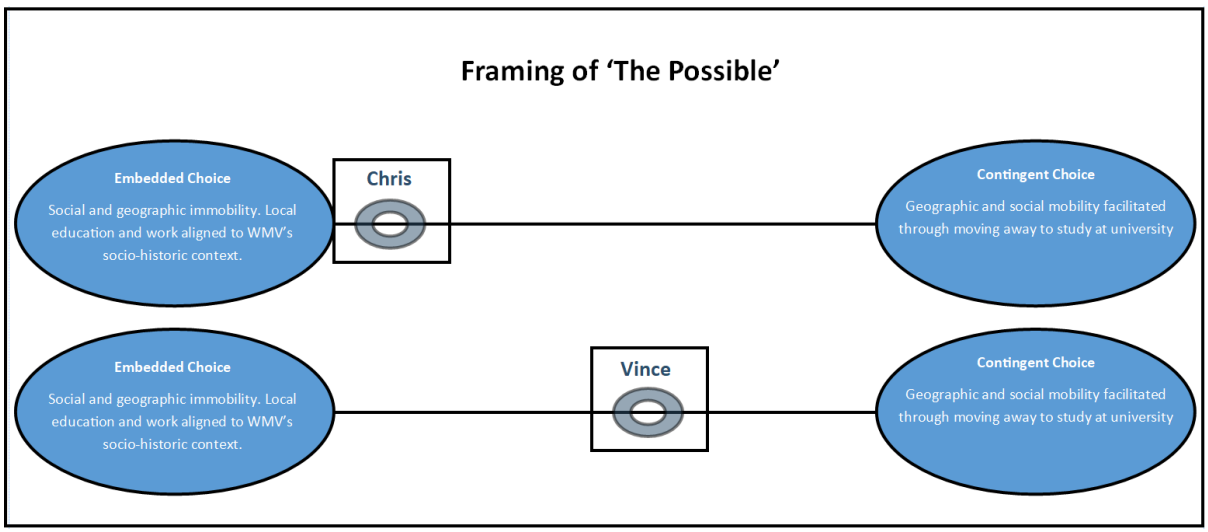


Fig 7.

Whilst Vince had support in the form of his cousins, resulting in the framing of his upcoming exams as an opportunity to succeed, Chris displayed high levels of anxiety about failure. The introspective personalisation of failure (Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013) by Chris as something which was inextricably linked to his worth meant that Chris

struggled to looked past the risk which failure posed to his wellbeing, serving to narrow the educational pathways which featured strongly within his *horizons for action*. For Chris, the weight of his family's intergenerational experiences of inequality bore down heavily on his shoulders, restricting his ability to move beyond an expectation of educational failure as the most likely outcome.

For each of the participants, engaging in practices to become spatially mobile was also a risk. Similar to previous research with prospective university students (Evans and Donnelly, 2018), both Mr D and Vince cited the strain that a geographically mobile educational trajectory would have placed on them given the levels of economic capital at their disposal. In both of their cases a pragmatic decision based on such considerations caused them to frame staying local most strongly within their *horizons for action*.

However, within Chris' narrative, the notion of geographic mobility was not present within his discourse. Similar to the accounts of his mother and grandmother in their framing of the opportunities available outside of the locality, it could be argued that, for Chris, the structural conditions in which he negotiated his expectations for the future, meant that a geographically mobile trajectory did not merely feature weakly within his horizons for action, rather it was not present within them at all. Lacking the appropriate resources to frame geographic mobility as an option, even if it was later ruled out, constituted what Bourdieu and Passeron would describe as an act of *symbolic violence* (1990, p.4). Within such a context, the forms of capital which were required to conceptualise geographic mobility were restricted and, as a result, the possibility of an educational trajectory resulting in geographic mobility was concealed.

However, within the experiences of the core participants and those closest to them, risks associated with undertaking activity aligned to the *doxic aspiration* of HE participation only represented one side of the coin. On the other side were the risks inherent within the *embedded choice*, one which was more familiar and posed the threat of reproducing intergenerational experiences of structural inequality.

Perhaps articulated most eloquently by Chris' mother, Judy, the risk of their youngest family members being stuck, or constrained by the structural conditions in which they were forming their educational expectations (Reay, 2017), posed a threat to their future security and happiness. In each of the core participants' cases, members of

their immediate social networks described how they mobilised capital at their disposal to guard against such an eventuality. However, the degree of success with which a socially mobile educational trajectory was established for each of the core participants, relied on the degree to which the forms of capital mobilised by members of their social networks held symbolic legitimacy toward such endeavour.

In the retrospective account of Mr D, his mother's educational experience combined with the 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent, 1998) which he was able to gain from Mr Jamerson, proved instrumental in establishing study at university within his *horizons for action*. Within Vince's experience, the role of his cousins in providing access to middle-class forms of social and cultural capital were important in bolstering the efforts of his mother to maintain his wellbeing in the classroom while accruing symbolically valuable cultural resources. However, in Chris' case he regularly experienced harassment by his peers which had a significant impact on the likelihood of his continued study at WMHS. Although his mother and grandmother mobilised every resource at their disposal to ensure that he did not become 'stuck' as a result of his choice, similar to research by Gillies (2006b), rather than employing the resources regularly mobilised by their middle-class contemporaries (Ball, 2003) to swing the odds of educational success in Chris' favour, their socio-historical position meant that their immediate efforts were focused toward protecting him from harm.

Within the retrospective account of Mr D and his social network, it could be argued that he successfully mediated the risks inherent within the accrual of capital toward his eventual HE participation, and the subversion of normative working-class career expectations linked to acceptable masculine practices (Roberts, 2017). However, as with his decision to maintain close ties to the locality, the investment in practices aligned to social and geographic mobility were partial and pragmatic. Through his choice of a career teaching Physical Education, Mr D hybridised his background and experience with those which were aligned to the *doxic aspiration* to shorten his walk across the tightrope, inhabiting a space which allowed him to *'successfully navigate both fields'* and '*accommodate both structures despite opposition'* (Ingram, 2018, p.65).

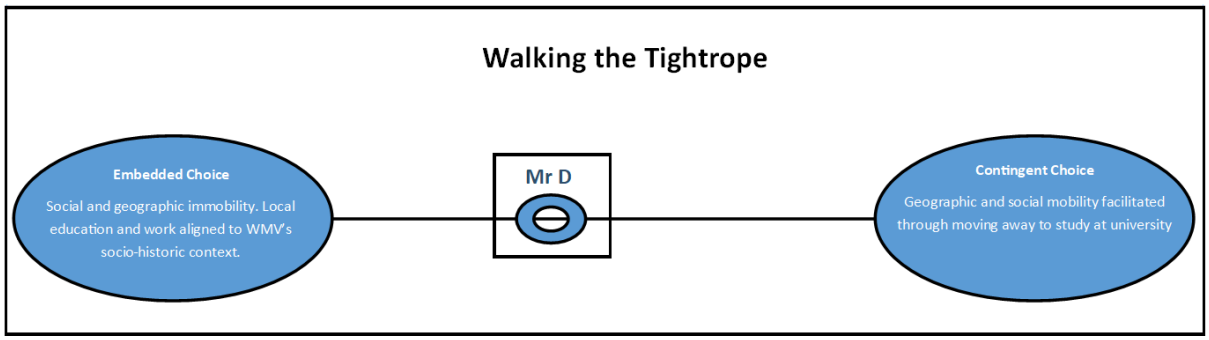


Fig 8.

Within the discourse of Chris, Vince and Mr D, there was little evidence to suggest that practices embedded within the institutional structure of the school played a significant role in constituting study in HE strongly within their *horizons for action*. Instead it was a pragmatic negotiation of risk. The risk of engaging in practices aligned with a *contingent choice*, lying largely outside of familial experience and carrying a real possibility of failure; against the risk of an *embedded choice* which threatened to reproduce the intergenerational effects of inequality experienced by those closest to them. For the core participants, the confidence in which they engaged in practices aligned with such a *contingent choice* largely relied on the social, cultural and economic capital which were available to them beyond the school gate.

7.2 A dislocation in expectation?

Within the data analysed by this study, there was little evidence that the strength with which educational and occupational destinations featured on the core participants' *horizons for action* were determined by a lack of hope or ambition commonly associated with discourses surrounding an aspirational deficit (Spohrer, 2016; Spohrer, 2011). Instead, the findings demonstrate a formation of future expectations developed in a relational manner with the forms of capital available in a post-industrial, working-class town in the West Midlands. A town which, due to the large-scale deindustrialisation (Willis, 1988) associated with a move toward a neoliberal, service driven economy, had undergone significant social and economic change.

During the discussion of the findings, there were numerous examples of a disjuncture between the capital held and legitimised by the study's participants, and those which were required to achieve the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility through HE participation.

In the discourse of Mr D's father Tom, and Chris' grandmother Margret, there was evidence of educational and career-based expectations for Mr D and Chris, developed relationally with their own experiences of education and work. Such experiences were accrued in a socio-economic context which had since undergone significant change. Whilst both Tom and Margret described their hopes that Mr D and Chris could follow a trajectory aligned with a traditional 'breadwinner' model of employment, opportunity to attain such work had receded, leaving precarious, low paid employment in its wake (Warren, 2007; Donaldson, 1993). A circumstance which, as reflected by Ward (2015), is experienced by other working-class communities with a similar industrial legacy.

When speaking of the sometimes undesirable consequences for individuals inhabiting social fields which had undergone a significant shift, Bourdieu coined the term *hysteresis* or '*a structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them'* (Bourdieu, 1977, p.83). Courtney (2017) and argues that within a context of rapid social change, the habitus of a de-privileged individual can become '*chronologically stranded, its dispositions out of sync with the new rules'* (p.1056).

In the context of this study, the discourse of Tom and Margret demonstrated such chronological disjuncture. Within the interviews, there was evidence of dispositions toward entry into paid employment and a 'job for life' after finishing compulsory education. Dispositions drawn from the geographically, and temporally contingent capital to which they had access.

In a wider social context where objective conditions meant that dispositions aligned to such a trajectory into employment may lead to precarious low paid work, Tom and Margret had limited access to alternative forms of capital which held symbolic value to the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility through university participation. A trajectory privileged in wider policy discourse as the route which held most legitimacy.

Whilst it could be argued that the misalignment of capital which aligned to HE participation was, in the cases of Tom and Margret, quite stark, a number of participants held forms of capital which both aligned and misaligned with such a trajectory. In the case of Mr D's mother Karen for example, her experience of attending a grammar school had equipped her with partial access to the cultural capital necessary to offer guidance to Mr D relating to his university participation. However,

as Karen's educational trajectory did not feature attendance at university herself, Mr D also had to draw on the experiences of Mr Jamerson to plug the gaps in knowledge and experience which she was unable to provide.

Through the practices deployed by WMHS at an institutional level, there was also evidence of such disjuncture. When talking about the unconscious investment of social actors in the rules, or the *doxa* of the field in which they participate, Bourdieu coins the term *illusio (1993)*. In the context of this study, the investment in question was toward the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility achieved through HE participation. An investment which, it could be argued that, through its deployment of practices, WMHS did not fully realise.

Given the resources available within the institution for staff to mobilise on the students' behalf, often activity deployed by the school to support the development of students' expectations toward future study at university aligned with individualised 'aspiration-raising'. Although the school deployed practices to promote the 'personal responsibility' of social mobility, a concern for the students' wellbeing fostered a resistance to a full investment through adherence to curriculum reform. For the students, this meant that they were receiving conflicting messages. On the one hand they were being encouraged to aspire toward Russell Group universities, being presented with students who had become geographically mobile as examples of success. On the other they were given the opportunity to take subjects at GCSE which aligned to their familial dispositions and working-class career orientations.

Differing from Davey's (2012) research at a UK-based independent school in which the practices associated with a full investment in the *doxic aspiration* of HE participation are described, within WMHS there was again evidence of a *hysteresis* effect. Through their engagement with the local community, staff realised that for many students the *contingent choice* of HE participation lay outside the experience of not just the students, but multiple generations of family and friends within WMV; often they did not believe the encouragement of such trajectories to be in the students' interests. So instead, practices deployed at WMHS partially aligned with an attempt to increase students social and geographic mobility, whilst at the same time attempting to build in provision aligned to the *embedded choice,* that of geographic immobility and a 'working-class job'.

However, in a setting characterised by recent and significant socio-economic change, it could be argued that the provision of activity aligned to the *embedded choice* constituted a chronological disjuncture. A disjuncture where there is a tendency

> *to adopt schemata and categories of thought, perception, evaluation and assessment are created, and which correspond to a past situation or time (Bourdieu, 2003: 188; Hurtado, 2010). Under these conditions the individuals act 'clumsily' or make mistakes. In other words, they do 'inappropriate' and 'unsuitable' things. This means that they adopt outdated practices which do not correspond to their present position in the context of the new objective conditions of the social field.* (Asimaki and Koustourakis, 2014, p.126)

In a context where increased credentialization through HE participation is deemed the educational trajectory of highest legitimacy, it could be argued in the case of WMHS *'the relative values of symbolic capitals are altered and the interactions between field structures and habitus are dislocated'* (Hardy, 2008, p.138). In other words, activity which was deployed to serve what staff perceived as the individual needs of the students given their socio-historical context, no longer aligned with the *doxic aspiration* embedded within the neoliberal field of secondary education.

Throughout the discussion of the findings detailed in this section, the complex process by which the study's core participants formed expectations for their future in education and work has been discussed. During the discussion, the tensions and risks associated with the white working-class boys' process of future decision-making were highlighted.

In accessing, accruing and mobilising resources aligned to the development of expectations for their future in education and work, the core participants engaged in a continual negotiation of risk. Risk featured in adopting expectations toward an *embedded choice* aligned with accessing forms of capital which were readily available within their local context, and in engaging in activity which could develop dispositions toward the *contingent choice* of university participation and geographic mobility.

It was also apparent that the development of the participants' future expectations was not an either/or binary, but rather the formation of expectations constituted a tightrope which each of the participants were walking / had walked with varying degrees of

success depending on the social, cultural and economic resources at their disposal. Such resources were not available to the students in isolation, but rather were contingent on the socio-historical experiences of those closest to them. Experiences which were formed in relational engagement with their geographic location and experiences of work in a climate characterised by significant economic change.

In an attempt to support the students of WMHS effectively, the institution attempted to deploy practices which were aligned to both the *embedded choice,* based on the perceived needs of the students within their individual contexts, and *the contingent choice* privileged by the neoliberal field as that which held most value. As a result, practices within the institution were deployed with competing, and at times paradoxical, objectives, causing only a partial investment in activity aligned with the *doxic aspiration* of increasing social and geographic mobility through a socially mobile educational trajectory.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

Using the scholarly endeavour examined in the literature review as a mechanism by which to identify the unique contribution to knowledge which could be made by this study (p.55-58); the conceptual approach, research questions and methodology were designed to extend understanding of the relational mechanisms by which future educational decisions by the study's participants were made.

Through engagement with the core participants, the educational institution which they inhabited, and members of their social networks who constituted their most trusted advisors, the study provided a means to conduct a deep exploration of how educational expectations were formed. Expectations which, as Chapter 7 demonstrates, were bound by the participants ability to access, accrue and mobilise capital which was of symbolic value to the *doxic aspiration* of geographic and social mobility through HE participation.

A study scaffolded within such a framework builds upon the research discussed in Chapter 2, furthering understanding of how educational 'choices' were made by participants in a relational dialogue with the social and cultural resources available within a de-industrialised town in the Black Country.

The following chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on the contribution of this study to the existing body of research which seeks to explore the impact of inequality in educational decision-making and university access for white working-class males. It discusses the scope of the research and its potential limitations, locating it within a wider canon of scholarly endeavour pertaining to the subject matter. The chapter discusses the implications of the study's findings for policy makers, schools, practitioners engaged in activity to widen access to HE, and, perhaps most importantly given the stated intentions of the research, it also discusses the implications of experiences of educational inequality for white working-class students and their families.

After a discussion of the study's implications, the chapter provides recommendations for further research pertaining to inequality and future educational decision-making, recommendations for policy makers with an interest in facilitating more equitable

access to HE for white working-class males, and recommendations for practitioners engaged in activity to widen university access.

8.1 Limitations

The findings outlined within this document are the product of a three-year piece of doctoral research. As such, there were constraints which limited both the length of time in which the participants were engaged by the researcher during the process of data collection, and the number of participants who were involved. Had more time and resource been available, a longer period of data collection with the core participants would have allowed a longitudinal approach. An approach which may have provided a deeper understanding of the relational process in which *horizons for action* were negotiated amongst those who constituted the study's core participants.

It is also worthy of note that the analysis of data was limited to those individuals who the core participants identified as influential in their future decision-making themselves. In the case of Chris, although rarely mentioned within the discourse detailed in Section 5.1, his father lived in the family home with his mother and grandmother. Whilst impossible to speculate upon, an interview with his father may have produced insights which added an additional layer of complexity to Chris' discourse about his own future decision-making.

In the context of my engagement with WMHS, it was often the case that requests for additional quantitative data on, for instance, student demographics were not always upheld due to the competing priorities of the staff. As such, when it came to providing contextual information for WMHS at an institutional level, the study was limited to what could be obtained from external sources. Being able to access such data would have provided a richer insight into the school context and greater justification for its selection as a location in which to conduct research.

Also, this research constitutes a small qualitative investigation located at a single institution, with a relatively small number of participants. As such, it could be argued that the particularities of circumstance in relation to the core participants at WMHS were unique to their geographic and sociohistorical location. However, within any research involving human participants, the particularities of their individual situations are likely to be equally unique. It was not the intention of this study to gain significant evidence of what white working-class male students' future intentions were through

quantitative indicators; rather it was to mobilise a methodological framework that offered a means by which to provide deep insight into the complex, relational series of negotiations inherent within the formation of their future expectations.

Scaffolding the research within such a methodological framework facilitated a depth of understanding. An understanding into how the participants' future orientations were formed within their specific context. In doing so it provided an opportunity for an explanatory device to be employed which took into account the complex, geographically situated, temporally contingent nature of the cases explored; a mechanism which facilitated a contribution to the existing body of research surrounding white working-class males and future educational decision-making.

A plethora of quantitative research has been conducted to chart the disparity in educational attainment and access to HE for white working-class boys (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019; Hillman and Robinson, 2016; Strand, S., 2014; Gillborn, Mirza and Ofsted., 2000). The sociology of education also has a rich history of research into the construction and negotiation of white working-class boys' educational identities (Ingram, 2018; Ward, 2015; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977).

With this in mind, a choice was made within the study to interrogate the relational, temporal nature of the formation of the core participants' educational and career expectations within the context of their specific geographic and social location. Through narrowing the lens of inquiry, the study offers an original contribution to knowledge, adding to the growing body of literature surrounding experiences of inequality, educational transitions, and HE participation for the white working class.

Within the analysis of the data, the study demonstrated how capital was accessed, accumulated, and mobilised by the participants in a relational dialogue with their specific socio-historic contexts. The trajectories of the core participants varied dependent on their experiences of, and engagement with, the cultural and social capital afforded by members of their network. However, there was evidence of the influence of place as a determining factor in the availability of relevant capital, capital which guided the formation of their future expectations.

Whilst this study demonstrates the intricacies of such an interplay within WMV, it would be naive to assume that such experiences would be mirrored exactly in social and geographic contexts which are similar, but different. Indeed, recent work by Donelly,

Gamsu and Whewall (2020) interrogates the relational nature of such experiences, highlighting the importance of 'spatial imaginaries' (p.93) in the formation of future educational orientations.

As the research demonstrates, the role of place influenced the resources available in the formation of the participants' *horizons for action.* As no two geographic locations or social contexts are identical, neither can be the precise circumstances in which future expectations are formed.

However, whilst a possible limitation of the study is that it does not provide a generalisable set of 'rules' about the future orientations of white working-class males, through the introduction of the tightrope in Chapter 7, it provides a means by which future intentions within differing contexts, such as rural coastal communities, can be explored in future research and practice.

Upon analysis of the data, it quickly became apparent that it could be argued many of the study's findings were as applicable to white working-class students more broadly as they are to white working-class males. Indeed, within the first research question relating to the deployment of institutional practices, it was those which were mobilised to support white working-class students more generally which were discussed. The choice made by the researcher to frame the enquiry in such a manner was because, within the context of the research location, there was very little resource available within the school to conduct activity specific to white working-class boys, and as such, the activities undertaken to support the development of white working-class boys' future expectations were the same as those deployed for the girls.

Data over the last decade has consistently shown that inequality within access to HE is not just the preserve of white working-class males, indeed the statistical gap in representation from 'disadvantaged' white males and females lies at 12% and 17% respectively, both significantly below that of other, more 'advantaged' groups (UCAS, 2018). In light of such statistics, it could be argued that many of the contributing factors toward underrepresentation in HE by white working-class students are due to their socio-economic position and a lack of access to relevant resources which lay the foundations of a socially mobile educational trajectory.

However, findings did highlight that amongst the core participants, engaging in practices aligned to HE participation constituted a subversion of normative working-

class masculinities; a subversion which had consequences for their wellbeing and status within their peer group. Alongside the lack of resources dictated by their class position and spatial location, the core participants experienced an additional threat to their wellbeing associated with the deviation from normative working-class masculine practices. Practices which were often more commonly associated with the middle class and were required in order to realise the narrowly defined 'ambition' of becoming educationally successful in alignment with the *doxic aspiration* of university participation and geographic mobility.

8.2 Implications

Located against a backdrop of government discourse which, for the last 22 years, has placed widening access to university as a central tenet of HE policy (Thompson, 2017), the findings discussed in this thesis have mobilised the theoretical tools of Pierre Bourdieu in conjunction with Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) sociological theory of career decision-making. Such a mobilisation has provided an original contribution to a growing body of knowledge, exploring how white working-class males negotiate future expectations within their specific cultural, social, geographic and economic contexts. The evidence presented frames the formation of future expectations not as a binary either/or investment in the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility, but rather as a process of acquisition, accumulation, negotiation and reconciliation of relevant resource in a precarious journey between an *embedded* and *contingent choice.*

As will be discussed below, the evidence provided holds implications pertaining to policy discourse surrounding white working-class boys in education and for educational practitioners engaged in activity to widen participation in HE. Such implications reach further than the participants involved in the study, or indeed the relatively narrow confines of the geographic location in which the research took place. They relate to the approach taken politically to increase HE access for white working-class students, the approach taken by educational practitioners in support of such an objective, and, perhaps most importantly, the social cultural and economic resources available to white working-class students and their families in pursuit of such an aim.

As supported by previous research into issues pertaining to inequality and access to HE , (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Khattab, 2015; Croll and Attwood, 2013b; Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014; St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013) there was little evidence

within the study to suggest that an aspirational 'lack' played a significant role in dictating decisions relating to the white working-class males' expectations for their future in education and work. Instead, the ease with which students developed expectations toward HE progression depended on their ability to access, accrue and mobilise resources which held symbolic value in the endeavour.

Such sentiments are not necessarily surprising given the findings of research examining future educational decision-making for working-class students discussed earlier in this thesis. However, with the specific focus of this research on white working-class males, alongside the mobilisation of a methodology which incorporated the intergenerational experiences of the students' social network, the research has provided a comparatively unique opportunity for reflection. One which shines a light on the implications of significant socio-economic change, risk and uncertainty in the likelihood of white working-class males perceiving HE participation as possible. Especially when such participation is often embedded within a wider individualised, neoliberal discourse which privileges access to elite universities and geographic mobility as the 'gold standard'.

The following passage considers the implications of this study for policy makers operating within the field of education, the schools impacted by political initiatives developed and implemented by such bodies, practitioners engaged in activity with the aim of widening HE participation, and the communities toward which such interventions are targeted.

8.2.1 Policy makers

Within the wider domain of educational policymaking in England, the findings of this study problematise discourses of an 'aspirational defecit' which have served to characterise the future orientations of white working-class boys in a simplistic, homogenised manner.

Interviews with the study's participants demonstrate the pervasive influence of such narratives which, as reflected within the data, made their way into the dialogue of several of WMHS's teaching staff. Research has argued that such narratives serve not only to place white working-class males at the heart of a deficit discourse in which their normative orientations are pathologized (Spohrer, 2016), but also overlooks the

complex process of acquiring and mobilising the necessary social, cultural and economic capital required to frame progression to HE as an expectation.

This study reinforces previous research which has provided a more nuanced account of the complexity inherent in future educational decision-making for working-class students (Archer and Hutchings, 2000) in an environment which, for many, HE participation constitutes a *contingent choice.* With the research's particular focus on the ways in which white working-class males accessed and employed capital in relational engagement with their sociohistorical and geographic context, the issues raised suggest that, for this group, such negotiations are no less complex. Complexities which, the evidence provided suggests, policy initiatives based on a premise of individual deficit are ill-equipped to address.

Data gathered with the core participants' social networks also highlight that future orientations are developed in dialogue with experience which spans beyond that of the individual 'decision maker'. Through the analysis of interviews with Chris, Vince and Mr D's social networks, the findings highlight the influence of those individuals who were the core participants most trusted advisers. Such advisers were rarely found in formal educational settings and drew upon lived experience spanning multiple generations to support the future decision-making of the study's core participants.

In a neoliberal policy context which privileges the individual, considerations surrounding the temporally persistent, intergenerational factors inherent in the formation of future expectations for working-class students are rarely acknowledged. Evidence from this study (Section 7.2) illustrates a need for a recognition that the ramifications of deindustrialisation have had a significant impact on individuals within white working-class communities across multiple generations. Ramifications which have served to limit access to the forms of capital which are deemed most desirable for university access, whilst at the same time encouraging individuals to aspire toward the most distant reaches of such an objective.

The findings suggest that, if meaningful progress is to be made in equipping white working-class males with the resources required to frame HE participation as 'possible', a recognition of the temporal, relational, structurally contingent factors which influence the formation of future expectations for white working-class males is required within policy.

8.2.2 Schools

Throughout the chapter which engaged with the deployment of resources by WMHS to develop white working-class students' future expectations, staff described a range of barriers which they felt restricted their ability to support students in their future decision-making. Many of the barriers described were systemic in nature and linked to wider reforms, such as the EBacc, within the field of education. As such, it could be argued that although this research was located at a single institution, the implications of educational reform on the staff members' ability to facilitate the deployment of practices to develop white working-class students' future orientations was not unique to the school participating in the study (Abrahams, 2017; Lingard, Sellar and Savage, 2014).

For staff at the institution, pressures faced regarding funding and meeting the performative requirements set by OFSTED restricted their ability to deploy practices which were geared toward the needs of the individual student. In a context where many of the staff interviewed recognised that following an educational trajectory aligned with the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility was not desirable for many of the WMHS students, they felt ill equipped to deploy alternative provision. The demands of a restrictive curriculum left little flexibility for those students who did not invest their energies in the, often *contingent choice,* of HE participation. Indeed, through the delegitimization of subject areas which were not aligned to the EBacc, staff were caught in a balancing act between attempting to accommodate students with a wide range of future orientations, whilst at the same time attempting to manage the risk of doing so in the context of school performance.

However, even though frustrations were aired over the inflexibility of the curriculum and the restrictive implications of policy decisions such as the EBacc, a commitment by staff to individualised 'aspiration raising' as a mechanism by which to promote HE participation was also in evidence.

As discussed in the previous chapter, tensions between the desire to do what the staff deemed to be the 'right thing by the students', and the pressure to promote an educational trajectory linked to geographic and social mobility as 'most desirable', meant that staff were caught between conflicting interests. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research (Ingram, 2009; Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010) has

commented upon a conflict between the identities of working-class students and the comparatively middle-class setting of a school.

Whilst within the study there is evidence which reinforces such notions, the findings demonstrate a more complex picture. A scenario in which the inculcation of individualised, meritocratic notions of future decision-making and a restrictive curriculum, limited the means by which staff could tailor provision to meet the needs of individual students. It has also suggested, through the discourse of both Mr D and Mr Jamerson, that although the school may be an institution commonly associated with the middle class, the dispositions of teachers may not operate in synchronicity with that of the institution.

Such a paradox implies possible consequences which reach beyond the location of a single secondary school in the Black Country. In a recent report by the OfS investigating perceptions of HE outreach activity (2019), evidence of perceived low aspiration by teachers amongst working-class students were demonstrated on a national scale. In light of such evidence, it could be argued that the study's findings are illustrative of a widely accepted discourse amongst teachers in schools that a model of 'aspiration raising' constitutes an effective, desirable mechanism by which to promote socially mobile educational trajectories. A discourse which, as demonstrated by the findings presented in this study, does little to provide parity of esteem to more vocational educational trajectories, or indeed tailor provision to the interests of some white working-class students. Students who, within such a narrative, are all too often presented as 'lacking'.

8.2.3 Practitioners engaged in activity to widen access to Higher Education

For practitioners engaged in activity to widen university access for white working-class boys, the findings discussed in this study provide an opportunity to better understand the complex elements which combine to inform the development of future educational expectations. In each of the cases presented, the core participants negotiated their future expectations differently depending on the availability of social, cultural and economic capital held by those individuals who constituted their most trusted advisors.

When writing about disparities in attainment for white working-class students, Gillborn and Kirton (2000) called for a need to recognise the nuances and intersections in experiences of inequality for the group within research. As mentioned earlier in the

thesis, such sentiments are mirrored by Reay (2009), who also calls for an explanation which goes beyond simplistic notions of cultural defecit when considering disparities in educational success for white working-class students.

In light of the study's findings, it could also be argued that for practitioners engaged in activity to widen HE participation, greater recognition of the complexities inherent in future decision-making for white working-class males is required. As suggested in previous research (Harrison and Waller, 2018) activity aligned to an agenda of individualised 'aspiration raising', supports a simplistic notion of future decision-making which does little to capture such complexity. The findings discussed in this document suggest that a more robust foundation, one which captures the heterogeneous and nuanced means by which 'what's possible' is constituted, is required to inform meaningful outreach activity.

The opportunities bestowed upon the study's core participants to accrue and mobilise capital which aligned with eventual study within HE, and therefore develop such trajectories strongly within their *horizons for action,* were tied to the social, geographic and temporal conditions in which they operated. For the participants, the socio-historic context in which they negotiated their expectations played a significant role in their conception of certain routes into education and work as 'possible'. Within such a context, the study demonstrated the important role that the core participants' social networks played in the development of future intentions toward (non) participation in HE.

However, with the notable exception of Mr D's relationship with Mr Jamerson, such networks were accessed outside of the formal educational setting of the school. For practitioners engaged in activity to widen HE participation, such findings hold implications for the models utilised to engage white working-class communities in activity designed to widen access to HE. For many HE Providers, alongside third sector organisations such as The Brilliant Club and The Sutton Trust, the primary model of practice for outreach activity is through engagement with students in schools. Reflecting on the findings of this study, it could be argued that such models, if not supported by intensive activity beyond the school gates, run the risk of overlooking engagement with key individuals who, in some cases, may be the students' most trusted advisors.

8.2.4 Students and their families

Finally, perhaps the most important implication of this study lies in the experiences of those white working-class males and their family members who, as they are situated at the sharp end of educational inequality, feel the most cuts. Throughout analysis of the data and discussion of the study's findings, the systemic nature of conditions restricting the future trajectories which could be strongly constituted within participants' *horizons for action* were discussed. Similar to the findings of Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick (2010), for each of the core participants, accessing HE constituted a risk. However, the ways in which the risk was internalised played out differently. For Chris, it was anxiety related to his future educational success similar to that mentioned in Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick's study. Whilst for Vince and Mr D, the risk of financial insecurity associated with moving away from home led them to discount a trajectory into HE which involved geographic mobility.

Wider research has suggested that financial considerations play a significant role in the future educational decision-making of working-class students relating to geographically mobile trajectories (Evans and Donnelly, 2018; Callender and Mason, 2017; Holdsworth, 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). The findings evidenced in this study reinforce such notions, suggesting that minimising the economic risk of HE participation was of central concern to the white working-class males for whom such notions featured within their *horizons for action*.

However, whilst a *doxic aspiration* which places social and geographic mobility as the ideal gives little recognition to the value of a partial investment in such a discourse, the data discussed in earlier chapters contests such a notion. For a number of the study's participants, an investment in HE participation at a local institution, whilst at the same time maintaining regular engagement with friends and family, was not an option that was deemed 'inferior'. Rather it provided a means by which to make study in HE more affordable, and an opportunity to maintain close ties to those who were closest to them.

Taking such reflections into consideration, a prevailing narrative which points the finger of blame solely at a lack of aspiration or drive (Burns, 2018), in an individualised conception of 'failure' to invest in the *doxic aspiration* amongst white working-class communities, omits a recognition of the complex structural mechanisms that have

served to withhold the resources that are required to frame socially mobile educational trajectories as possible. It also fails to recognise the importance of social ties to friends, family members and the local community through its perpetuation of an individualised, meritocratic narrative. Such ties, for the participants engaged within this study, held great importance.

When taken into consideration alongside the difficulties faced by the school in tailoring provision to meet the heterogenous future intentions of the students; such implications suggest the that persistence of a narrative which overlooks the relational nature of future decision-making in favour of an individualised, meritocratic discourse, will have little impact on increasing the participation of white working-class males in HE.

8.3 Recommendations

In light of the discussion of the study's findings and the implications described above, the following passage details recommendations for further research, policy development and practice by Higher Education Providers conducting activity with the aim of widening access to HE for white working-class males:

Further Research

- Development of a greater body of educational research across multiple geographic locations, turning the lens of focus to the role of white working-class males' social networks in future educational decision-making.
- Similar research to be conducted amongst different groups such as white working-class females, black working-class students and mature students who experience under-representation in HE; exploring how intergenerational, socio-historic influences shape the development of future orientations aligned to education and work.

Policy

- A sustained effort made within policy discourse aligned with access to HE to challenge narratives of an 'aspirational defecit' amongst white working-class students and their families.
- Policy activity to recognise the complex, different and nuanced means by which white working-class males form expectations toward their future education and work.

- Parity of esteem given to the diverse means by which study within HE can be undertaken, including a revision of terminology linked to HE progression by policy makers.

Widening Participation Practice

- An increased number of Higher Education Providers citing white working-class males specifically within access targets detailed in university Access and Participation Plans.
- Development of a model of activity which recognises the complexity and risk involved in accessing HE for many white working-class students and their families.
- To take a more holistic approach in widening access to HE; one which reaches beyond the school gate, recognising and celebrating the role of the students' social networks and locality in developing orientations toward HE participation.
- The removal of 'aspiration raising' as a stated aim of widening access activity conducted by Higher Education Providers.

8.3.1 Further Research

The approach used by this study provided a means to build upon existing research in educational decision-making which engaged with the participants' social network (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011); while at the same time refining the lens of focus to the negotiation of white working-class males' future expectations. Through its mobilisation of methodological and theoretical devices, the study explored the intersecting, relational considerations which shape future educational intentions, (dis)allowing space for new, *contingent* orientations to be formed.

The findings of this study demonstrate the value in engaging in research which addresses the temporal and geographic position in which future educational intentions are conceived and cemented. However, as detailed in Chapter 2, bar the notable exception of Fuller, Heath and Johnstone (2011), there is still relatively little research which engages with the role of the social network in relation to future educational decision-making for working-class students. Therefore, it is recommended that future

research into the subject provides a mechanism which engages those individuals who are closest to the 'decision maker', as well as the students themselves.

Whilst it is true that the study effectively employed such tools to explore the development of the core participants' orientations, it is also true that white working-class males constitute but one group of many who experience unequal opportunity in access to HE. To further understanding, future research could follow a similar model to provide a depth of understanding across groups who have been identified as experiencing comparative under-representation in HE. The gap identified in the literature review extends beyond that of just white working-class boys and, as suggested by Vincent *et al.* (2015), experiences of inequality in educational decision-making differ amongst such groups. Future research would provide an opportunity to explore how intersections of such experiences play out in the educational decision-making of different demographics who are all too often homogenised within a discourse of 'low aspiration'.

8.3.2 Policy

This study, alongside aforementioned research by the OfS (2019), illustrates how entrenched a 'poverty of aspiration' discourse has become amongst educational practitioners in schools. Evidence suggests it informs both the perceptions of working-class students' future intentions by staff and is used as a rationale for the deployment of activity to widen HE access and participation. It has also demonstrated how, within the context of the study's participants, such a narrative does little to recognise the nuance, complexity and risk involved in the process undertaken to frame study in HE as 'possible'.

In light of such evidence, it is recommended that those engaged in discourse on a national platform, make a concerted effort to challenge the narrative of 'aspirational defecit' amongst educational practitioners. Instead, a greater emphasis should be made on 'levelling the playing field', focusing on policy mechanisms whereby white working-class males can secure easier access to the social and cultural resources required to develop expectations in alignment with HE progression.

Alongside its well-documented perpetuation of a discourse which centres around individualised 'deficit', a *doxic aspiration* which promotes a narrowly defined residential experience at a higher tariff university serves to delegitimise alternative experiences

of HE. As can be seen in the speculative dialogue of Vince, or the retrospective account of Mr D, moving away from home to study at a high tariff university was not necessarily the most desirable route of educational continuation for the study's participants. Instead, for Vince and Mr D, a maintenance of their connection to the community and existing social ties, alongside a significantly reduced economic burden, made HE study at a local provider an appealing prospect.

In light of such findings, it is recommended that for white working-class males, a discourse surrounding HE participation which is confined to a narrow, residential model is inappropriate. Instead a narrative which celebrates an experience of HE that involves 'staying local', alongside study at alternative providers, would encourage the alignment of HE with normative expectations in predominately white, working-class communities such as WMV. As highlighted in a recent paper by Atherton and Mazhari (2019), white working-class students can be found in much higher demographics within colleges of Further Education. As such, in order for HE to become more widely accessible, it is recommended that the diverse means by which HE study can be conducted, such as engaging with provision at colleges of Further Education, is given greater recognition.

A possible mechanism by which the discourse of policy makers could assist in the accomplishment of such an objective, lies in a reframing of terminology surrounding HE progression. Rather than speaking of HE participation within the narrow bandwidth of a degree at a university, phrasing HE participation as 'progression to level 4 study' would encompass a broader suite of qualifications, ones which arguably do not receive parity of esteem within current political discourse. Recognising the value of HE qualifications often studied at colleges of Further Education such as Higher National Certificates and Diplomas within policy narratives, may assist in a move to make HE more accessible for those white working-class students who constituted the focus of this research.

8.3.3 Widening Participation Practice

The final set of recommendations within this section are geared toward Higher Education Providers which conduct activity with the aim of widening access to their own institutions. In a recent report by the OfS, the comparatively low number of

university Access and Participation Plans which gave specific mention to white working-class males was documented.

> *For those living in areas of low higher education participation or from lower household income or socioeconomic status backgrounds, there were 201 access targets, 218 success targets and 419 progression targets in total. Of these, 11 targets related specifically to white economically disadvantaged men (sometimes known as white working-class men) (2019, p.36)*

Of the 838 targets set relating to university access, success and progression by providers, only 11 gave specific mention to white working-class males. Given the complex nature of the development of future expectations documented within this study, it would appear that given such evidence, there is little strategic activity taking place at an institutional level by universities to address the group's disparity in HE access. Therefore, it is recommended that institutions in geographic areas with high densities of white working-class students make a strategic commitment to increasing the proportion of white working-class individuals studying at their universities, citing them specifically in Access and Participation Plans.

Secondly, it is recommended that considerably more work by Higher Education Providers and outreach practitioners is conducted with the communities in which white working-class students reside. Although some pockets of good practice exist in universities taking a more holistic approach to outreach activity (King's College London, 2018), often widening access initiatives are geared toward individual students and are conducted almost exclusively in the setting of either a school or a university. Both this study and previously published research (Fuller, Heath and Johnston, 2011) highlight the important role of the social network in working-class students' future educational decision-making. Within such a context, a case can be made for widening participation activity that extends beyond the school gate, providing multiple generations of individuals in working-class communities with the social, cultural and economic resources required to frame progression to university as an expectation.

The findings from this study, alongside those which have examined the role of aspiration in widening access to HE (St Clair, Kintrea and Houston, 2013; Baker, 2016; Spohrer, 2016), warn against the pitfalls of conducting activity embedded within a

rationale of 'aspiration raising'. However, as illustrated in the introductory section of this these, and at numerous points throughout the subsequent discussions, there are many Higher Education Providers which still cite 'raising aspiration' as a stated aim of their activity.

The final recommendation of this section calls for this to change. Instead it is argued that to maximise its effectiveness as a tool to support greater equity in access to HE, widening participation activity conducted by institutions should be embedded within more conceptually robust frameworks; frameworks which offer a means by which access to HE can be constituted as an expectation. Models like *horizons for action* (1997) mobilised by this study, Sen's *capabilities approach* adopted by Hart (2013), or Harrison's (2018) *possible selves* model, all provide an opportunity to develop modes of widening participation practice which go beyond simplistic, individualised, potentially harmful notions of 'aspirational deficit'. An opportunity which, if taken, holds potential for outreach activity to be centred around providing the resources required for study in HE to be constituted as an expectation, rather than an abstract hope or ambition.

8.4 Concluding remarks

Reflecting on the findings outlined in the study, and indeed the wider research cited to support it, it is clear that the chances of a white working-class male framing HE participation strongly within their *horizons for action,* are closely linked to structural conditions which dictate the availability of social, cultural and economic resources to which they have access. Such conditions are not isolated to an individualised 'choice', but rather are embedded within experiences of education and work spanning multiple generations, and persistent structural conditions which have (re)produced educational inequality.

Whilst, as discussed in Chapter 2, previous studies have shined a light on the educational transitions of white working-class boys in de-industrialised communities across the UK (Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Ward, 2015; Ingram, 2018) , and others have examined inequality and educational decision-making (Roberts, 2012; Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Burke, 2007; Ball, Reay and David, 2002; Archer and Hutchings, 2000) this research tightened the lens of focus. Within a wider context where nationally access to HE for young white working-class males is just 12%

(Atherton and Mazhari, 2019), the research sought to build upon existing knowledge; outlining its intentions in Chapter 1 to provide a depth of understanding as to how the study's participants accessed, acquired and mobilised capital to form future expectations; expectations which were negotiated within a locality which keenly felt the socio-economic consequences of deindustrialisation.

Mobilising the theoretical tools of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) alongside Hodkinson and Sparkes *horizons for action* (1996), section 2.5 introduced a conceptual mechanism by which to engage with the study's overarching research questions:

1. How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?

2. How do white working-class males draw upon the resources available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?

3. How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?

Outlining the methodological approach of a series of qualitative case studies located at a single secondary school in the Black Country in Chapter 3, the research engaged with the school's staff, students and members of their social networks in an effort to provide a deep understanding. An understanding of how, within their specific geographic, social and historical context, resources were drawn upon to form white working-class males' intentions pertaining to their future education and work.

After examining the means by which the staff at the school deployed practices to develop the future expectations of white working-class students at an institutional level (Chapter 4), the research engaged with data from the core participants and members of their social networks. Chapters 5 and 6 shone a light on the complex processes through which the core participants accessed, acquired and negotiated with available resource to form expectations about their future in education and work.

The data illustrated how such a process was not an individualised endeavour in 'choice' making which was the sole purview of the core participant. Rather it demonstrated how future educational decisions were made in relational engagement with the influence of socio-historic conditions which had a significantly greater impact

than that which is recognised within a meritocratic, individualised neoliberal discourse. As Reay (2009, p.27) asserts, such experiences formed part of a '*collective memory*' of educational inequality present within multiple generations of individuals engaged within the research. The influence of the locality's socio-economic history, the ability of the school to deploy resources, and the experiences of members of the core participants' social networks, were all fundamental in a relational negotiation which amalgamated to inform the core participants' *horizons for action*.

The key findings discussed in Chapter 7 linked the data with the study's overarching research questions. It demonstrated that future educational decision-making amongst the participants was not an either/or binary in which their orientations aligned with the *embedded* or *contingent* choice. Instead, the process constituted a tightrope. A tightrope in which the formation of future trajectories involved a pragmatic negotiation and reconciliation of risk. For those involved, investment in both the *contingent* and *embedded* choice constituted a risky endeavour. Often such risks were tied to the structural conditions in which the participants operated; conditions which were experienced intergenerationally. Risks aligned to the *contingent choice* involved accrual of debt, fear of failure and the prospect of being singled out by their peers should they invest in the *doxic aspiration*. Whilst those aligned to an *embedded choice,* would serve to reproduce familial experiences of inequality and a precarious economic position. In light of such findings, the study presented evidence of shorter journeys on the tightrope; ones which constituted a partial investment in the *doxic aspiration* of social and geographic mobility, whilst at the same time remaining within the locality and minimising social distance between family and friends.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, within media and political discourses related to white working-class males, educational success, and access to HE, a narrative of an individualised 'lack' of aspiration has been prominent. The findings of this study serve to pose a strong challenge to such a narrative. Through the mobilisation of a conceptual and methodological framework which facilitated a deep engagement with the ways in which the white working-class participants negotiated their future expectations, the social, geographic and temporal dimensions of such 'choices' were explored. Ones that, rather than floating free of the social, geographic and historical conditions in which they were made, were an exercise in negotiating a trajectory by which they could flourish despite them.

The study's findings illustrated that, for the white working-class males involved, the playing field regarding opportunity to access HE in communities such as WMV is far from even. The research unpicked the complex, persistent pervasive means by which such an imbalance may be (re)produced across multiple generations within de-industrialised, working-class localities.

It ended by discussing the implications of such systemic imbalance, providing recommendations for developments in research, policy and practice. Developments which, if acted upon, may serve as a partial counterbalance to the persistent structural inequalities faced by white working-class males and their families when deciding 'what's possible' for their future in education and work.

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Appendix 1 – Parents Letter

Boys of the Black Country: An investigation in to the educational success of working-class white males from the West Midlands region

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is Alex Blower and I'm currently a PhD student at the University of Wolverhampton. I am writing to inform you that your child is interested in being involved in a study that I am conducting. The aim of the research is to develop an understanding of the expectations for educational success of young men from the Black Country region. As your child is under the age of 18, your consent is also required for their participation.

I have asked your child to participate in my study for the next 12 months (January 2018 – January 2019). During this time your son will take part in a mentoring programme lasting 10 – 14 weeks, and participate in a maximum of 3 one to one interviews.

Your child has been given a separate letter for the research, which it would be useful to also read through first. Within the letter it is made clear that any data collected will be anonymous, and that they can withdraw from the research at any time without having to specify a reason.

This research is being undertaken in conjunction with the University of Wolverhampton, as well as your child's school. I have undergone all the vetting processes necessary to demonstrate that I am an appropriate person to work with young people. This includes going through an extended DBS check, and submitting a proposal to the ethical research panel at the University of Wolverhampton for scrutiny.

By working with your child over the next 12 months, I hope to explore their expectations in education and how it might influence their decisions about the future. Upon completing the research, a printed copy of any interviews conducted with your child will be given to them for approval before they are used to further develop the research.

Prior to starting the research in January, I will also be attending the school's parents evening on Thursday 14th December. I hope that this can be used as an opportunity to meet you, and provide a little more detail about the project.

Your child's participation in the study will help to provide a valuable insight in to how the expectations for educational success of young men in the Black Country region are shaped. If you would like to discuss any of the information detailed above further, please feel free to contact either myself or my primary supervisor, Dr Maria Tsouroufli, on [redacted] or [redacted]

I look forward to meeting you on Thursday 14th December.

Best wishes

Alex Blower

Telephone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

Appendix 2 – Student Letter

Alex Blower – PhD Student – School of Education – Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing

Information about 'Boys of the Black Country' study

My name is Alex Blower and I'm a research student at the University of Wolverhampton. I am doing my PhD in Education, and I would like you to support my research project. The project is based at your school, and explores the expectations of boys about their future education.

I hope to collect information about how this might be influenced by the school that students go to, and explore who or what might shape a learner's expectations about succeeding in education.

As a participant in this research you will be asked to take part in an informal mentoring programme lasting 10-14 weeks, and take part in a maximum of 3 one to one interviews over a 12 month period. This will start in January 2018 and finish in January 2019.

All of the information that is collected will be anonymous and treated as confidential. No information will be passed on to anyone else unless there are implications for personal safety and/or well-being, and it will only be used for my research. This study will follow ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), and will comply with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

Should you choose to take part, you will be able to withdraw from the study at any time. Any data provided would also be destroyed and not used in the project. By taking part in this study, you will be able to explore your expectations about your future and how they might be shaped.

If you wish to participate in this study then information will also be sent to your parent or guardian. I would encourage you to discuss your participation in the study with them, as they will have to give consent to your participation too. You and your parent will also be invited to discuss the project in more detail at the school parents evening taking place on Thursday 14th December.

It is not anticipated that any risks should arise from this research. If you or your parent/guardian have any questions about the research then please contact me, or alternatively my supervisor Dr Maria Tsouroufli by contacting [redacted] or [redacted]

Many thanks for taking the time to read the information sheet.

Best wishes

Alex Blower

Telephone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

Appendix 3 – Adult Consent Form

Alex Blower

Email: [redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

Boys of the Black Country: An investigation in to the educational success of working-class white males from the West Midlands region

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project which is being conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Guidelines. Details of these can be found at:

http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF

Please read the following statements and sign at the bottom if you agree with them:

"I understand that by consenting to take part in this interview that the information provided will be used alongside a range of other research that is taking place as part of the study. I understand that participation will involve an interview. Data from these will be used in the study alongside researcher's own observations and reflections.

I understand that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. I can ask questions at any time and can discuss any concerns with Alex Blower or his supervisors Dr Maria Tsouroufli or Prof Nazira Karodia throughout the research process.

I understand that the information I give for the interview will be recorded and transcribed. The information provided in the interview will be treated as confidential. Any extracts used will be anonymous in this study and in any future publications. I also understand that every effort will be made to ensure that comments cannot be attributed to me unless I give further consent for my name to be used.

I understand that if I say something that I do not want to be used in the study I can ask for it to be excluded. I also understand that data will be stored on an encrypted device for a period of 5 years, after which the data will be destroyed."

"I _____ (NAME) consent to participation in the study of Alex Blower (Faculty of Health, Education and Wellbeing) with the supervision of Dr Maria Tsouroufli ([redacted]), Prof Nazira Karodia ([redacted])

Signed: .....

Email: .....

Date: .....

Appendix 4 – Student Consent Form

Alex Blower

Email: [redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

Boys of the Black Country: An investigation in to the educational success of working-class white males from the West Midlands region

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project, which is being conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Guidelines. Details of these can be found at:

http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF

Please read the following statements and sign at the bottom if you agree with them:

"I understand that I will be asked to take part in this study for 12 months, from January 2018 to January 2019. I understand that taking part will involve up to 3 interviews and an informal mentoring programme lasting 10-14 weeks. The information from these will be used alongside the researcher's own observations and reflections."

I understand that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw or be withdrawn from the study at any time without giving a reason. I can ask questions at any time, and can discuss any concerns with Alex Blower or his supervisors Dr Maria Tsouroufli or Prof Nazira Karodia throughout the research process.

I understand that the information given in the interviews, and observations made during the mentoring process, will be used anonymously in this study and in any future publications. The researcher will ensure that comments cannot be attributed to me, unless further consent is given for my name to be used.

I understand that I will be given printed copies of any interviews for approval. If I say something that in hindsight I do not want to be used in the study, then I can ask for it to be removed. I also understand that the data collected will be held on an encrypted device for a period of 5 years, after which time it will be destroyed"

"I ..... consent to participation in the study of Alex Blower (Faculty of Health, Education and Wellbeing) with the supervision of Dr Maria Tsouroufli ([redacted], Prof Nazira Karodia ([redacted]

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Date: .....

Appendix 5 – Parent Consent Form

Alex Blower

Email: [redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

Boys of the Black Country: An investigation in to the educational success of working-class white males from the West Midlands region

Thank you for agreeing to allow your child to take part in this research project, which is being conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Guidelines. Details of these can be found at:

http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICA1.PDF

Please read the following statements and sign at the bottom if you agree with them:

"I understand that my child will be asked to participate in this study for 12 months, from January 2018 to January 2019. I understand that taking part will involve up to 3 interviews and an informal mentoring programme lasting 10-14 weeks. The data from these will be used alongside the researcher's own observations and reflections."

I understand that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary and that my child can withdraw or be withdrawn from the study at any time without giving a reason. I can ask questions at any time and can discuss any concerns with Alex Blower or his supervisors Dr Maria Tsouroufli or Prof Nazira Karodia throughout the research process.

I understand that the information given in the interviews, and observations made during the mentoring process, will be used anonymously in this study and in any future publications. The researcher will ensure that comments cannot be attributed to my child, unless further consent is given for their name to be used.

I understand that my child will be given printed copies of any interviews for approval. If my child says something that in hindsight they do not want to be used in the study, they can ask for it to be excluded. I also understand that the data collected will be held on an encrypted device for a period of 5 years, after which time it will be destroyed"

"I ..... consent to my child's participation in the study of Alex Blower (Faculty of Health, Education and Wellbeing) with the supervision of Dr Maria Tsouroufli ([redacted], Prof Nazira Karodia ([redacted])

Signed: .....

Email: .....

Date: .....

Appendix 6 – Staff Stories of Memorable Interactions with White Working-Class Boys

Miss Jenkins

I'm going to tell you a very, it is going to be very positive. I worked with a young man who all he was interested in was Birmingham City FC. He came to school, he used to distract others in lessons and he'd tap them on the shoulder, and it'd be like 'did you watch the match? Are going to the match?'. I'd be constantly saying to this young man, come on lets get back to learning. His spelling was poor, I used to have to guide him with his spelling. He would be fidgeting, he would be distracting and he was like 'oh I dunno what I'm doing when I leave school'. He wasn't involved in drugs but he would be drinking a little bit before he should have been. His behaviour was quite rude to staff. Family breakdown. Didn't have a good relationship with mom some of the time, didn't like step dad, had half brothers, couldn't settle. It got to year 11, this is one of my mentees who I had and was always under my wing, and I said to him look, you don't seem to understand that you haven't got very long left before you go, here we go again with this time thing, you don't seem to understand it. But I said all I'm telling you now is your behaviour, your disrespect for your teachers, your disrespect for your own learning, your disrespect for your family, your disrespect for your future is going to stop you. It's going to close a big massive door. You're going to lose your education because they will put you out. This is back in the days when they used to do study leave. He looked at me and he went you're joking, and I says I'm deadly serious mate, I says I've done everything I can do for you, I can do no more. I keep backing you, saying he'll try etc. I said you are letting yourself down. I don't know what happened after that conversation, I don't know whether it was a lightbulb moment with this young man, but he was like ok I'm really going to try. Well I went I've been trying to get you to try for 4 years so if you can do it now I'm going to be so happy! He turned himself around completely and he worked, and he worked, and he worked. He didn't get fantastic results but he got anough to get on in sixth form. He did his A levels in sixth form. When he was going in to upper 6th he came to see me and he said will you help me write a personal statement. I said what for? He said I'm going for head boy. I said I don't know how they'll take that bab but yeah I'm all for it. I helped him write it, helped

him write his personal statement for university, he was elected joint head boy, he went to university, he left two years ago and he sent me a message to say I can't thank you enough for what you did for me, I've just got my first in criminology and it's the best days work you ever did the day you took me on and worked with me. I'm very very proud of him. Incredibly proud. That's my biggest success story. He went form being an absolute nightmare to head boy, to getting a first which is no mean feat.

Miss Adams

There was one lad who an ex partner of mine wanted an apprentice for a building firm. And the firm had written to a lot of local schools and said we've got a space for an apprentice is anybody interested. The letter had come in to school. We've always been very good at telling kids about this sort of thing. Some schools don't some schools do. But I obviously had got a bit of inside information and I knew one lad who was just perfect, but I didn't want to say that obviously because it would have influenced it. So it took a lot of doing to convince this kids to apply for it without him knowing the background. His mom actually bought him a new suit. I said to him if I were you I'd get rid of the earing, because we're talking 25 years ago, I'd get rid of the earing and I'd have your hair cut if I were you. With me first impressions count. Fair dos he did, he did. And of course he went for the interview and he got it, and I knew he would, and my ex knew who he was. He came in the day after with a bunch of flowers and said I got the job (starts crying). And I went oh brilliant! And then it was only about 6 months later there was a works do, and we went to the works do and his face when he saw me. He went why are you here? I said well I'll tell you know, your boss is my husband. He said well you never told me, and I said no I didn't. But that was amazing. But it was giving him that confidence to do it and being in a position to get it. And he's still working there now. But it's nice things like that, it's when those kids get that confidence and you give them that confidence to go. There's lots of specific kids and names that are just, but that's what makes it worthwhile. Stand out moments, there's no one big stand out moment. It's not things like OFSTED saying you're a good school or you're a bad school because that's their opinion. It's what happens day to day. And it's those little things that are the stand outs. Yeah.

Mr Jamerson

One that does bring a lump to my throat really when I think about it is one lad, and it was when we were mentoring actually. He lost, he was looking after his mom and nobody knew. His elder brother came here and he came here. He was just always in trouble. He always wanted to get excluded, he always wanted to be at home. It turns out that he was looking after his mom. His mom wasn't well. His brother had left school and gone to get a job because he needed to get money for the family, and it turns out he was just looking after his mom and stuff. Then his mom actually passed away. So helping him to deal with 1 overcoming his academic barriers to learning that was just he wouldn't engage, he wasn't interested. He was more concerned about mom which was rightly so as well. So providing that support, and getting support for him from outside agencies within the house as well. Because they hadn't got anyone, they hadn't tapped in to any social services or care to help mom. So they hadn't even gone to the doctors and gone through this, mom was just really passing away in front of their eyes and they hadn't gone nowhere because they thought they'd be taken away. So we basically nurtured him through school, myself and S. He became dependent on us. Sometimes it was difficult, because you have to. Sometimes it was difficult to cut off from the school gate and going home yourself. To be honest in those circumstances or the role that you do in that sense it's really hard. I found that really difficult the first few years because you're thinking about them all the time especially when he's going home and you don't know whether he's eating, and going to school the next day you have to pick him up. But we got him through his coursework, he done all his GCSE's, he got 5+ GCSE's, he went to college, we took him to his interviews. Like I say his mom passed away which was horrendous for him. We helped him sort the funeral out and stuff like that, him and his brother. Took him to the funeral and sorted all that out because he'd got no family either. We sorted out his accommodation. His brother moved back and they lived together because he wasn't old enough to live by himself. But we helped him through. He's got a job now, he's got his own family and we saw them. We went out for some food for one of the staff's birthday and he come in with his brother, and they were just so grate…, not grateful but appreciative of what we'd done for them. And for them to say that to us it was just like wow. That's kind of blows your mind really when you've had an impact on someone that's completely changed the course of their lives. For them to say that to you it's just like whoa yeah. There's a

couple of instances like that but that one is just the most powerful thing because he's now, he's got a couple of kids of his own. His engaged to be married, he's got his own house, he's got a job and he's doing really well. To think of where he's come from and what he's been through. For him to be there now is just amazing. I mean there's stories where it's gone the wrong way and they''ve gone the wrong way and some haven't made it and some have ended up in prison or whatever. Then they'll come out of prison and they'll be in their late 20s and they'll say we should have listened to you and S. We should of done this, done that. And they talk about the good times, what they see as all of the projects that we used to do with them. They still remember that thing. A lot of them have gone in to youth work because they remember the impact that it had on them, the way they went and they don't want the youth around them in their area to be the same. They then say to me and S well that's because of the way that you two were with us. We want to do the same. That's quite powerful as well.

Miss Philips

I have lunch duty with year 9, and there's one or two of the boys in there are quite rude and will not follow instructions. And it's that sort of, I'm not doing it. I do tend to get that, there are some yeah who will just point blank refuse.